DIALOGUE AS LIBERATION: ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER'S DIALOGICAL PROCESS FOR RELIGIO-CULTURAL HARMONY AND PEACE

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ABSTRACT:

This paper focuses on the contribution of Asghar Ali Engineer's services, views and his methodology of liberation and emancipation of human beings from unreasonable shackles of religious restraints through dialogue, as the best method for liberation from all sorts of sufferings and troubles, with the references to modern Quranic exegesis and the traditions of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He contributed in praxis for the settlement of socio-religious and communal issues and had the vision to reduce the disputes and differences of such clashes through dialogue. He argues that the Quran condemns the superiority of one's race and faith, and it determines to liberate people from injustice, oppression, and inequality. He concludes that the message of the Quran is, first, to liberate people from suffering, and second to build the good relations with other people of faiths. The Quran, according to Engineer, suggests that there is no compulsion in religion, he openly invites for dialogue to understand and respect each other to build communal, cultural and religious harmony and peaceful coexistence.

KEYWORDS: ASghar ali engineer; dialogue; liberation; quranic exegesis; socio-religious, cultural harmony and peace.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st Century is the age of globalization, science, and technology, but many human societies are stumbling in several crises. Today, millions of people are suffering from injustice and oppression. Human beings still face the distress of unemployment, poverty, starvation, malnourishment and homelessness. The crisis of refugees and marginalized people is big challenge in the modern world. Thanks to war and violence that have caused immense socio-politico-religious (in term of religious extremism and ethno-religious nationalism) and economic crisis. Many people around the world have abandoned their homes and lands in search for low wage jobs, facing the quandaries, bearing the torment of the racism and discrimination. Beside such common social anguishes and evils, there is also discrimination and dehumanization, corruption, injustice, persecution, terrorism, fanaticism, and gender inequality. Additionally, many other evils and troubles in different shapes have afflicted on either poor born people or on the minorities in different parts of the globe. While, on the other hand, ethno-religious nationalism and intolerance, inter and intra-religious group conflicts and clashes are at large. Religio-cultural and racial clashes are the biggest threat to peace. These problems are like a plague that has marred the socioeconomic, religious and cultural harmony. It needs to be addressed on an international level to diminish the superiority of one's race, faith, and color on one hand, and religious-cultural peace, harmony, tolerance and coexistence should be promoted on the other hand as per the Quranic message. In this regard, though it is hard into praxis, but many intellectuals hope to have such achievements. They opined to promote and project the idea of "dialogue" as best method and tool for either minimizing the conflict or transform it. Through dialogue, they assert that the maximum result could be obtained for the development of

love, peace, harmony and tolerance.

Having all such troubles and sufferings in the modern world, Engineer's contribution in this regard is worth mentioning here. Engineer not only demonstrated all such injunctions and verses of the Quran but reflected into its praxis personally. He was an activist and an arbitrator between the communal clashes in India.[1] His thoughts, speeches, and writings are great contributions to focus on mainly the basic concepts of liberation in the Quranic perspective. The basic concept of the Quranic liberation is focused on justice, freedom and equality on one hand, and the condemnation of exploitation of man by man, oppression, and persecution on the other.[2] Engineer, through the verses of the Quran, which are mainly mentioned and interpreted by him as the main source of making the theology of liberation, reflected in his writing that Muhammad played the role as a liberator for humanity because he was inspired by God and instructed through revelation.[3] Thus revelation was a revolutionary movement that revived the dignity of a human being from slavery and social bondage, from poverty and suppression, and from the hegemony of one dominant rich class. Islam, according to him, by its initial teachings, denounced ignorance, illiteracy, atrocity and injustice. It, further, condemned polytheism and superstition, and stressed to have a firm belief in the Oneness of God; the Creator and the Sustainer of the Universe; diminished illusion and phantom, depreciated the tribal customs,

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[1] Asghar Ali. *A living faith, my Quest for peace, Harmony and social change*, New Delhi, Orient Blacksawn Private Limited. (2011)

[2] Engineer, Asghar Ali, *Islam and its relevance to our age*, p, 97, Bombay, Shoaib S Ranalvi. (1984)

[3] Engineer, Asghar Ali. *Rational Approach to Islam.* p, 171-178, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House (2001)

hierarchical social structures and racism. And, thus, substantiated and authenticated the education, knowledge, wisdom, justice, equality, respect, and fairness.[4] Additionally, Islam is the religion that embraces the religious pluralism and teaches the same values that Muslims have to respect every ideology, culture, community, and religion. The purpose of diversity is for the purpose of knowing one another. God did not make us one community but wanted to test us, and all will be accountable to Him on the Day of Judgment. The prophets were sent to each and every community and they had their own way of worship. That is why it was suggested by the Quran to compete others with good deeds[5]. And in the light of this verse, it is also implied that people should not create the anarchy solely based on religious/belief differences but leave the final judgment to God. The best way to diminish the differences is by engaging in dialogue; to communicate with each other, to solve the difference, to observe the tolerances, to respect each other's culture and religious traditions, and to learn others way of living and culture for religious-cultural peace, harmony and coexistence.[6]

Dialogue:

Dialogue is defined by Leonard Swidler (2008) as a two-way communication between people who hold significantly differing views on the subject, with the purpose of learning more truth about the subject of

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[4] Engineer, *Islam and its relevance to our age*. p., 88-129.
[5] Al-Quran 2:148.
[6] Engineer, *Islam: restructuring theology*, p, 95-96, New Delhi, Vitasta Publishing. (2012)

the other. Dialogue is not the process of imparting truth, however gently and kindly, to the ignorant. Dialogue must include a common understanding that no one has a monopoly on the truth on any given subject.[7] Same views rendered by Catherine Corneille (2013) that dialogue in its ideal form involves a conversation or exchange in which participants are willing to listen to and learn from one another. It is the possibility of mutual learning which makes dialogue more than a luxury or benevolent pastime for the curious, and renders it a matter of internal religious necessity or opportunity.[8]In fact, dialogue is being understood as comparative theology in the broad sense of the term, due to its constructive engagement between religious texts, teachings, and practices oriented toward the possibility of change and growth. To be sure, far from every dialogue between religions will actually yield religious fruit. However, it is the very possibility that one may learn from the other which moves religious traditions from self-sufficiency to openness to the other.[9]

Liberation?

The online etymology dictionary describes the origin of the word "liberation", as derived from the Latin word '*liberationem*' past participle of Liberia from Liberia, which means "set free". It referred "to free an occupied territory from the enemy".[10]   Same meaning could also be

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[7] Leonard Swidler, "what is Dialogue, interfaith Dialogue at grass Roots", In Rebecca Kratz Mays (ed), *Interfaith Dialogue at grass Roots*, Philadelphia, Ecumenical Press, p.11. (2008).

[8] Catherine Cornille., *Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue*, In The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue, (pp. 20). UK, John Wiley & Sons Publishers.(2013)

[9] Ibid. p, 21

[10] See Online Etymology dictionary http://www.etymonline.com

derived from Webster's dictionary, 1) to set free or to release from restraint or bondage; 2) to set at liberty, to give release or let loose, 3), to appropriate or steal from an enemy or an occupied country. [11] Further, the meaning of liberation as provided by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary includes, 1) to free a country or people from the control of someone else. 2) To free somebody from something that restricts their enjoyment of life. [12]Thus, "liberation" (n) a state of being free, derived early 15 C.A from Middle French libération and directly from Latin *liberationem* "a setting or becoming free".[13]

"Liberation" has a multi-dimensional meaning and concepts. It is a goal that can be achieved and a dream to be reflected in true; everyone has to strive for it either to achieve in his or her deliverance in this life in different socio-economic and religious context or to struggle for achieving the salvation in spiritual perspective.

Asghar Ali Engineer's Formation as a progressive Muslim.

Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013) was one of the figures among those intellectual's lists who always wrote against the injustice and religious intolerance. He was an Indian progressive Muslim reformer of the modern age who belonged to the Shi'a Isma'ili Musta'lian Bohra sub-sect of Islam. As a young boy, Engineer learned Urdu, Arabic, Hindi and English and also was educated in *tafsir* or Qur'anic commentary, Isma'ili *ta'wil, hadith, fiqh*, Islamic theology and history. He obtained an engineering degree

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[11] Noah Webster, Webster's New twentieth Century Dictionary of The English language, 2nd ed, p.1042. Cleveland and New York, The world publishing company. (1971)
[12] A S. Hornby, Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary of Current English. 8th ed. p.855 Oxford University Press. (2010)
[13] Ibid.

from the University of Indore and thereafter worked as a civil engineer for the Bombay Municipal Corporation for twenty years. In 1980, Engineer founded the Institute of Islamic Studies, and in 1993, the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism. He authored more than 70 books and contributed articles to various national and international periodicals and newspapers. He was the convener of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN). He also received several awards, such as the *Dalmia* Award for communal harmony in 1990, an honorary D.Litt. from the University of Calcutta in 1993, the National Communal Harmony Award in 1997 and the Right Livelihood Award in 2004.[14]

Engineer's reformative and revolutionary inclination developed when he underwent some bitter experiences of his own community's corruption that exploited the religion. He felt that such religious and so-called spiritual leaders exploited the religion, enslaved the poor naive and innocent people. Thus, people are so afraid that have no dare to argue with them. They are being used and politicized for their leaders' interests and power. On account of such huge malicious attitude and practices of that politico-religious chiefs who used the religion for their benefit, Engineer, first resisted them, stepped ahead, joined the reformist movement, rebelled against the status quo of his community and opposed its leaders' authoritarian in religion. By lieu of such un-Islamic practices that he observed within the community, he then went ahead and looked at same modern issues in the Islamic world and Muslim societies too, like, oppression, subjugation, corruption and politics using the name of religion,

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[14] Yusuf Imtiyaz, Dr. "Asghar Ali Engineer". In Sharma Arvind (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Indian Religion*, Springer Netherlands.

injustice in all its spheres, religious exclusivism and intolerance that stopped people to advance any development.

Observing and addressing such common malignancies in general, he tried to restructure the theology in sociological perspective or socially engaged Islam, realizing its importance and need of reforms in the society that has been corrupted by either lusty rulers or few religious orthodox mindsets. Keeping in mind all these socio-politico and religious complexities, Engineer studied both Islamic and western literature from a traditional as well as modern perspective and got developed liberal, modern and progressive rather than traditional. He put his all efforts to focus on the social problem more than theological. Then, he became activist and democratic figure by reflecting and applying the core teachings of the Quran for implementing the true spirit of service to God, the almighty, who Himself directs for His creation on the earth for observing justice among themselves.[15] By taking account such common socio-economic injustice, he condemned not only the so-called religious leaders but also despised those dogmatic-oriented orthodox Muslim scholars, who only stressed on theology in its metaphysical context, but not its essence or spirit that what is actual theology and what God wants for His people on the earth. Their minds, according to Engineer, are still stagnant and do not log to transformation for moderation. Muslim scholars were also used as a weapon for the opponents of their political leaders after the end of the Islamic caliphate period. On one side, Engineer was disturbed by the religious exploitation of such leaders and Imams, while on the other hand,

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[15]Risma hikmawati "Asghar Ali Engineer: Because Revelation is Not Contradictory with Reason"/ cited March 31, 2016. Available from http://www.rahima.or.id/

he was completely troubled by the communal violence in India. He would always question that why people kill in the name of religion when no religion teaches killing and violence. This question sometimes led him to long excogitation, and at last, he decided to study the reasons and causes of such communal violence in which many people lost their lives without any cause. He took charge and decided to devote his time to promoting peace and communal harmony so that innocent people were not to be killed. In this regard, he wrote in many journals, met many persons to get help to embark upon this mission to ease the tension of communal conflicts and bring peace within the confronting groups.[16] For making this mission possible, he did it practically, formed an organization which was called *Awaz-e- Biradran* (voice of brotherhood). It was a struggle and sincere efforts for raising the voice against the communal clashes and creating the harmony and national integration. That organization also joined for Indo-Pak friendship so that it might establish the better relation between Hindus and Muslims.[17] For doing and putting such efforts, Engineer's main purpose was to bring the people on the same page; to lessen the religious exclusivism and extremism, to reduce the cultural, tribal, ethnic-nationalistic and communal difference; and to pave the way for religious tolerance, harmony and coexistence.

Engineer's socio-religious activism:

Engineer was brought up in a religious atmosphere in Shi'ah Isma'ili tradition of Islam followed by Bohra community. Though his father (Shaikh Qurban Hussain) was a religious cleric, but he didn't want his son

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[16] Engineer, *A living faith, my quest for peace, harmony and social change*, p, 24.
[17] Ibid. p. 25

to follow his footsteps. He wanted his son to be a doctor or engineer because he didn't want his son to be enslaved by religious priests. Engineer's traditional breakup point started when he visited the highest priest of Bohra community with his father and he was told to kiss and prostrate the priest. But Engineer refused to do so because he had a firm belief that in Islam, there is no one who deserves to be prostrated except God, the Almighty. This visit according to him, "was to become a horrifying experience for him and became in many ways a turning point in his life." Since then, he promised to bring reforms and will struggle to liberate people from such un-Islamic practices within his community.[18] Engineer wrote an autobiography, "*A living faith: My Quest for peace, harmony and Social change*", where he describes almost all the events and experiences of his life. He writes bluntly and exposes the unhuman and undemocratic attitude of the Bohra rules that paralyzed its people. He describes that

"No Bohra can marry or bury his dead or set up any organization or contest any election without the permission of the priest. A Bohra community member enjoys no freedom of his/ her own. He has to literally declare himself/herself as the slave in marriage invitation cards or any petition submitted to him. He/she will be excommunicated and will get completely isolated from his family and friends if he/she doesn't obey the order of the priest. He cannot even attend marriage or funeral and the marriage can be broken if any one among spouse join the reformist group. Even mothers can also break the relation with their children as do sisters

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[18] Engineer, *A living faith, my quest for peace, harmony and social change*, p, 13-14.

and brothers. Thus, the highest priest had the power to control over the religious and secular."[19]

Due to such un-Islamic practices in his Bohra community, he joined Bohra reform movement. Observing such experiences, he wrote articles against these tyrannical rules and exploitations of religion to draw the attention of the general masses. In this journey, he was threatened with bad consequences, assaulted many times and was seriously injured but he did not step down from his struggle against oppression and injustice and continued his struggle as he could.[20]

Dialogue as Praxis:

Engineer's another ideal in his journey towards the betterment of the society and especially the moral behavior which must be practically observed is the examples of the Prophet Muhammad, who is the role model of his philosophy and understanding the true spirit of Islamic values (respect, dignity and honor) that are enriched in the life of the prophet. Engineer frequently gives the example of the traditions (*Hadith*) in his writings. Like the Engineer, other Muslims have also firm belief that Prophet Muhammad's throughout life is a perfect example for not only his followers but for all entire human beings. This idea is also supported by the Quran itself. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s life is full of compassion and he had a good relationship with the people of the entire Arab peninsula. His practical examples are called Sunnah,[21] that is the practical

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[19] Ibid. p. 14-15
[20] Ibid. p. 43
[21]Sunnah means, Line of Conduct; Mode of life; Behavior; Example; Precedence or Dispensation. Life is to be molded into a shape as molded

way or his actions that guide a person who wants to seek right path.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was not only the messenger who just conveyed the message of God to the people but observed that revealed messages into praxis. His entire life was recorded and fully preserved in many books. He was the living model of the teachings of the Quran. The Quran asserts that God has sent His prophet as a model or example for the humanity. It means the life of a prophet is a good example for the people of entire humanity.[22] In other words, if any person who wants to lead a virtuous life, he should observe the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his behavior and his conduct because he showed a perfect character for everyone; may he be rich or poor, king or beggar, man or woman of all ages working in all professions and trades, they may find the perfect examples in the life of the prophet Muhammad. The character of Prophet Muhammad (PBHU) is infallible and his manners were exemplary. There is no parallel of the character and the manners of the prophet. His actions, behavior, and manners are called Sunnah. If this concept is to be taken in a broader sense, then it could be the best approach to consider that all Prophets and messengers who were sent to their community and nation were the best paragons for their era.

Though, before Muhammad's prophethood, there are many examples of dialogue and interaction, friendly relations and commercial partnerships with all kinds of people, (atheists, idolaters, and People of the Book). Numerous such events have been described in many Sirah or history

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the prophet. See Dictionary of the Quran, Abdul Mannan Omar, p, 274, UK & Germany, Noor Foundation - International Inc. (2003).

[22] "*There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often.*" Al-Quran, 33:21

books.[23] According to Muhamad Zia-ul-Haq (2014) the first such event was, when Muhammad went to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib for trade and met with Bhira, the monk, he prophesied that Muhammad was to become a prophet. The second event, when Muhammad got the first revelation, then, his wife Khadeeja took him to her cousin Warqa Ibn Nawfal and told him about the revelation. After listening to the whole story from Muhammad, he acknowledged the authenticity of Muhammad's prophethood.[24] Muhammad, too, recognized justice and honor of the people of all faiths. It is reported that when Muslims, before migration to Medina, suffered severe persecution in Mecca by the Quresh, then Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) suggested them to migrate to Abyssinia and told them about the qualities of the King of Abyssinia, Negus, "There is a King who loves justice and in whose territories nobody is oppressed."[25] It is also reported that a dialogue held between the delegations of Muslims with the King of Abyssinia, Negus. After hearing the views of Muslim migrants, the king protected them and allowed them to live in his country peacefully without any fear.[26] Prophet Muhammad (PBHU) had also dialogue and agreement with the Jews of Medina which is known as *Mithaq-e-Medina*. That constitution was to be meant that everyone is protected and will live in the city with full religious liberty. It

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[23] Kurucan, Ahmet and Mustafa Kasim Erol."Dialogue in Islam: Quran-Sunnah-History", p.70. Great Britain, Dialogue Society. (2012).

[24] Ibn Hisham. Sirah Ibn Hisham/Biography of the prophet. p, 25-26. (Inas A. Farid, (Trans). Al-Fallah Foundation, Cairo, Egypt. (2000).

[25] Hamidullah, Muhammad. *The life and works of the founder of Islam*, p, 74. (Ghazi, Mahmood Ahmed, Trans.) Adam Publishers (1975).

[26] Zia-ul-Haq, Muhammad. "Muslims' Participation in Interfaith Dialogue: Challenges and Prospects" pp.613-646. p. 629, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Fall 2014.

is also illustrated that Muhammad had a dialogue with Christian too. It is also reported that one delegation of Christians of Najran, in 633 C.E, comprising of sixty people came and met with Prophet Muhammad and initiated dialogue with Prophet Muhammad on religious matters.[27] So, the legitimacy of interfaith dialogue could be considered as clear from the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad and it Muslims were taught that dialogue is the only way of building peace among people of different faiths.

The interaction between Muslims and other religions existed culturally, politically, and economically for many years. Such process of interaction was very smooth going, but after September eleven attacks, the scenario has totally changed, and the notion of dialogue has shifted to the Muslim communities exclusively. In such series of dialogue, it has been a good outcome for a Muslim to make understand people and to develop a better understanding of Islam and Muslims through Interfaith dialogue.[28] Muslim scholars are engaged now to show such expression that the majority of Muslims condemned these violent attacks. Only a small portion of Muslims who want to establish their political authority and impose their own ideology, exploit the religious teachings just to enjoy their own interests. Such kind of people could be found in almost all religions who do not want peace on earth. Behind such religious tension and violence, there are some other economic and communal factors which might be the reasons for such clashes.

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[27] Ibid. p, 629-30.
[28] Halafoff, Anna. "Encounter as Conflict: Interfaith Peace-Building", p.227, In David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt and David Thomas. (eds.). *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, pp. 262-280, UK, Oxford University Press (2013).

Engineer's Passage to Dialogue:

Dialogue is indispensable. Engineer portrays that due to the faster flux of migration from one corner of the world to the other, many societies, today, have been merged in multi-cultural, religious, racial and linguistic zones, has become a challenge. Gone those days when, in medieval ages, Muslims and Christians were on a mission to preach their religions to other nations and other people and that is why these both religions' followers are scattered throughout the world. Though, he claims that such missionary activities still exist in some parts of Asia and Africa and both religions are still competing with each other increasing sheer numbers of followers there. In Europe and western countries, such missionaries (both Muslims and Christians) are causing religious tension rather than harmony. He urges that for minimizing such tensions, now, one has to initiate the interreligious dialogue for the religious harmony and coexistence in the modern age.[29] He opines that the main Quranic spirit and values are to give respect and dignity to each other without any discrimination. God has mentioned in the Quran that *"We have bestowed dignity on the progeny of Adam and conferred on them special favor, above a great part of Our creation."*[30] From this verse, it can be concluded that all the people must be united in single humanity. Religion, race, color are secondary. But Instead of such valuable teachings and guidance given by God, there are conflicts and discontentment. So, to diminish such clashes, there are solutions. Here he gives some guidelines for inter-religious dialogue.

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[29] Engineer, *Islam challenging in 21st century*, p, 69. New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House. (2014).
[30] Al-Quran, 17:7

Engineer's Methodology towards Interfaith or Intercultural Dialogue:

Engineer's main sources for justification of dialogue as it has been described earlier are the Quran and the *Sirah* of the prophet. He describes that Quran makes it possible to approach other religions in the best manner and recognizes their truth. The Quran not only recognizes other prophets but also teaches to respect and dignify them. Engineer believes that if we have been taught to respect other religions and prophets by the Quran, it also meant to respect other religious followers too so that mutual understanding may develop among the followers.[31] He argues that God, the almighty sent prophets to each and every nation, and now it is up to their followers either they comply with their scriptures and their prophets' teachings or not. The Quran clearly tells that there is no compulsion in religion[32]. From this verse, it can be illustrated that if a person who is born in any religious family, it does not mean that somebody will proselytize him or her to his or her faith. Even prophet Muhammad was not responsible to convert any person forcefully. The only task that was given to the prophet was to convey the message. Every man will be judged according to his deeds. The Quran is very clear on this subject. It also gives the freedom to choose either way from good or bad. Everyone will reap what he sows in his life and he will never be treated unjustly. On the other hand, the prophets are only for guidance to show the path and convey the message of the Almighty. He also believed that in getting the disputes settled among themselves, the dialogue is the best way to address the issues and their solutions. The Quran paves the way for reconciliation

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[31] Engineer*, Rational Approach to Islam*, p, 101. New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House. (2001).
[32] Al-Quran 2:256

among the faiths through dialogue.[33]

As far as Engineer's methodology of dialogue is concerned, it is the same as his other contemporary theologians adopted through some certain rules necessary for success in achieving the goal of bringing all religions on one point to understand and respect each other's faith and culture. For religious and cultural dialogue, he took the idea from the western Cristian theologian, Leonardo Swidler, Paul. F Knitter and Hans Kung. He also got the idea from many Muslim progressive scholars, like Muhammad Abu Nimar, Shafiq Muhammad and Ismail Al-Faruqi. He indirectly mentioned and described almost the same rules as were described earlier by his contemporary scholars. He not only highlighted the Quranic position of religious diversity and pluralism, but he also explained that the Quran also encourages to have the inter-religious connection, observe the tolerance and respect each other's places of worship to come on the same page to bring peace, religious harmony and coexistence[34].

He believes that dialogue or the conversation with the best manner, love, gentleness and humbleness is more profitable and helpful in achieving an atmosphere of co-existence. He believes that the "Quranic requirement for dialogue is wisdom and goodly exhortation." It does not encourage undesirable methods. For resolution and reconciliation, dialogue is the best and the Quranic way. Knowing, trusting, listening and learning from one another are the keys of successful dialogue. It is a kind of meeting and

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[33] Engineer, *Islam in Post-Modern World*. Delhi, Hope India Publications. (2008)

[34] Bhutto Sanaullah, Bhutto Saifullah, Chandio Muhammad Tufail (2017), Protection and Respect for the Places of Worship in Islam**,** *Ma'arif Research Journal*, issue 13, Jan-June 2017, pp. 9-16.

not to be considered as confrontation. Inner motivation and inner feelings are more encouraged. Missionary method or having harsh words with others will lead to more complexity that will not be fruitful. In all such processes, having dialogue either linguistically or culturally, quality knowledge is a must that will ease the tension, otherwise ignorance or having semi-knowledge will lead to prejudice and biasness.[35] He exhorts that Islam teaches Muslims to live in peace with others, including religious, linguistic, racial or national origins and such methods of dialogue could be the possible way to advance towards peace. Engineer's main determination was to use dialogue as a tool not only for peace building among religious and communal antagonistic groups but it could be the best source for getting liberated from the worldly sufferings of injustice, inequality and poverty. It is the way, through which, better consequences could be achieved. He philosophizes that conflicts and clashes could not be minimized by fighting each other as it perpetuates towards more destruction. It needs reconciliation and arbitration. Let parties be on some agreements to resolve their all socio-politico and religious issues by the good democratic way. For reaching on some congenial point which may lead to the potential settlement, dialogue is the best medium to be utilized as medicine in every step. It will be better to pay back as compensation rather than fighting for getting revenge. It is better to be compassionate rather than to be merciless and forgiveness is better than retaliation.[36]

Engineer as Revivalist:

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[35] Engineer, *Islam challenging in the 21st century*, p, 69-78. New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House. (2014).
[36] Ibid. p, 69-78.

The main theme of Engineer's discourse is to reflect the true message of the Quran to build the good relations with people of other faiths. It gives religious freedom and argues that there is no compulsion in religion. The Quran clearly indicates that God has created the diversity of people and religions. The Quran demonstrates to the Muslims that it accepts the validity of other religions and requires from the believers not to discriminate among the prophets of God. Hence, according to Engineer, it is part of the faith to respect and recognize all prophets, whether mentioned in Quran or not. Engineer believes the message which is received by the Quran is, the open offer to have a dialogue with others with wisdom and good behavior[37] for making less the tension. In other words, it urges to understand others.[38] He assumes that the Quranic approach and method of dialogue is very positive and friendly to others. It exhorts to maintain the very gentle way during the process of dialogue. The Quran advises Muslims to argue with the People of the Book in the best possible manner[39] because the Quran shows the highest respect for Abrahamic faith prophets. In view of such high respect of the prophets, it also intends to their adherents to build mutual respect and understanding. Thus, Muslims should not be hesitant in having dialogue with followers of other faiths as the Quran recognizes that there many other prophets who are not mentioned in the Quran[40]. It is obvious from this verse that the Quran accepts the existence of other religions and enjoins believers to have friendly relations with others. In this regard, Engineer gives the

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[37] Quran 16: 25.
[38] Ibid p, 69-70.
[39] Quran 16: 125.
[40] Quran 40: 78.

example and appreciates the role played by some Sufi saints for religious harmony, who have accepted some highly revered Hindu religious figures like Rama and Krishna as prophets. It has been estimated that dialogue is the need of the hour, and for promoting the spirit of dialogue, as per Quranic directives, it should not to intended to influence or convert others, to oppose others' faith. Rather it should be carried out for listening others to build the mutual trust. The Quran calls for finding commonality instead of differences.[41] It is a great wisdom of the Quranic way to build the mutual trust among the religions. Such steps will lead to the peaceful coexistence. At the end, Engineer maintains that dialogue creates the culture of tolerance and culture of respect. Islam teaches Muslims to live in peace with others. It will be a very good achievement when Muslims live among diverse traditions with the spirit of tolerance and with the commitment to please God as exemplified in the praxis of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

CONCLUSION

The above discussion proves that dialogue is the best way to eradicate religious intolerance from extremist groups of followers of different religions. Dialogue is not something, which Engineer has pointed out newly, but he has only revived the true teachings of Quran and Prophet Muhammad. Quran contains many verses, which encourage on religious co-existence, mutual cordial relations between the followers of different religions, maintaining peace & harmony in society. Prophet Muhammad through his practice made it possible by maintaining good relations with the people of other faiths, doing agreements with them, giving them the

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[41] Quran 3: 64.

liberty to follow their religion. As it has been mentioned in the paper; the true teachings of Islam have been hijacked and manipulated by a small group of extremist Muslims, we need reformists like Asghar Ali Engineer who combat with those extremist groups with bravery. Religious people in general need to be moderate and say no to extremism. It is possible by initiating process of dialogue between religious groups, developing the culture of listening each other patiently and accepting the others` right to disagree. This can be achieved by finding out the common points and avoiding the factors, which create difference and disagreement to the extent of violent behavior. Religious intolerance is a big threat to the peace & security of the world today. It needs to be overcome. Truth must prevail and world should return to peace, harmony and co-existence.