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RESEARCH PAPER

Highlighting Global Peace and Harmony in Muslim Scholars' Religious Discourse: A Positive Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at highlighting the moderate ideologies in Muslim Scholars' religious discourse. The background of the study is religion as an important social institution that not only produces and controls religious discourse but also form opinion of its audience. Furthermore, religion motivates its audience for desired actions. That's why it becomes significant to analyze religious discourse. In this study, qualitative methods have been used to analyze the speeches of the Muslim Scholars from the lens of positive discourse analysis known as PDA. PDA is a sub-discipline of critical discourse analysis known as CDA. The data of this study was the speeches of Muslim scholars that was collected through purposive sampling. The speeches were directly addressed in English. The Data was secondary in nature since it was downloaded from YouTube. Key findings of this research are very profound. The dominant themes that emerged from the speeches of Muslim scholars were peace and harmony both at local and global levels. Finally on the basis of results, certain recommendations are made in relation to religious discourse of Muslim Scholars. These recommendations may be valuable for the peace-building through interfaith harmony and interfaith dialogue. The study recommends that these moderate discourses can be used by peace organizations that working for interfaith harmony and peace-building. It is also recommended that such moderate discourses should be encouraged and promoted by the governments. These moderate discourses should also be highlighted by media houses so that religious extremism and radicalization may be dissuaded.

KEYWORDS:	CDA, PDA and Religious Discourse

Introduction

Religion is as an important social institution that produces and controls religious discourse. Presently, religious discourse is being analyzed objectively at different levels like other discourses but the religious scholars are not satisfied with this analysis. Wijsen (2009) gives his argument that there has been dissatisfaction among religious scholars with objective definitions and methods of studying religion. Wijsen (2009) expects that critical discourse analysis (CDA) can close this gap as it is the combination of sociological analysis and linguistic analysis.

Critical discourse analysis, sometimes known as CDA, is a subfield of discourse analysis that was researched and developed in the late 1980s by a number of linguists, notably Fairclough and Van Dijk. A possible interpretation of CDA is that it represents a pushback against the dominant uncritical paradigms in language theory. It is necessary to use a multidisciplinary approach in addition to having a grasp of the many connections that exist between written text, spoken language, social cognition, political authority, and cultural norms and values. Many researches have been carried out in last four decades in

CDA where the discourse has only been analyzed to create and highlight boundaries between self and other. In these studies the discourse has not been analyzed to investigate socio-political conflicts and ways to solve them for creating harmony and peace and making this worth a worth living place. This is how the new approach within CDA has been developed from the name of positive discourse analysis, PDA (Khurshid and Janjua, 2022).

Literature Review

This sections explores the previous researches that are carried out to analyze the religious discourse of Muslim scholars. There are different studies of different natures regarding the religious discourse of Muslim scholars. Rubab et al. (2021) think that Islamic sermons not only persuade the audience for the desired position or action but also give true understanding of life in form of a complete set of guidelines for humanity. Their study analyzes the Islamic sermons from the perspective of positive self-representation and negative other-representation but the study does not reveal how reformative the discourse of Islamic sermons is. This is where the researcher feels the void and he wants to fill this gap by analyzing the Islamic sermons from reformative and positive perspective highlighting the ideological moderation in Muslim Scholars' religious discourse in form of sermons and speeches. Errihani (2011) has the opinion that moderate discourse is a discourse that mainly focuses religious and social matters that promote inter-faith harmony and global peace, not radicalization. He concludes in his research study that the religious scholars in Morocco use persuasive strategies to persuade the congregation and move them to action but the check of Moroccan state on the religious practices of its subjects keeps the religious discourse of sermons moderate. He is of the view that the efforts of Moroccan state in controlling and managing the religious discourse of sermons has been successful. Now the state controlled sermons are moderate and less controversial being grounded in moderate religious discourse, not in politics. These sermons focus on the salvation of the audience putting stress on moral conduct and fear of God. Before the involvement of Moroccan state in religious practices, the sermons were advocating the political militancy and pleading the establishment of an Islamic State based on their own understanding of Islam.

Wani, Abdullah, and Chang (2015)are of the opinion that religious peace can be promoted and interfaith harmony can be achieved in religiously diverse societies by highlighting the commonalities among the religions. They are in favor of interreligious dialogue. They prefer religious diversity to identity. They support the concept of religious diversity from the verses of holy Quran at general level. Zaduqisti, Mashuri, Zuhri, Haryati, and Ula (2020) conclude in their study that the Islamic moderateness is one of the key factors that promote peace in Islamic societies where the religious minorities can live peacefully and fearlessly.

Al-nuaimy (2018) concludes that it is the need of time to bring moderation in religious discourse. He suggests that the Islamic religious discourse should be given under the responsibility of specialized religious institutions. In this way, the Islamic religious discourse can be moderate and mature. He further emphasizes the distancing of the religion from politics. Akbar and Yaseen (2020) give their opinion that the promotion inter-faith harmony is the need of time for peaceful living in Pakistani society. They assert that the Islamic scholars through their discourse can promote interfaith harmony. This will ensure the peaceful co-existence of all religions in Pakistan.

Mehfooz (2021)reveals in his research article that Pakistan is a religiously diverse state. Both the Islam and the constitution of Pakistan ensure the religious freedom. But, unfortunately, some Muslim clerics oppose religious pluralism which contradicts to the

basic principles of Islam that indicate religious diversity. In my opinion, government of Pakistan can ensure the peaceful co-existence of all religions formulating some tangible policies concerning the Islamic religious discourse being produced in Pakistan. Sajjad, Christie, and Taylor (2017) reveal in their study that Pakistani youth is overwhelmingly in favor of modern and moderate approach towards religion. Pakistani youth is a supporter of inclusive Islam that emphasizes religious freedom and harmony among different religions. Al-Otaibi (2020) concludes in his study that the government of Saudi Arabia is striving to eliminate the extremist narrative from religious education and religious discourse. The government emphasizes the moderate religious interpretation. This is the part of the reformation of education for vision 2030 of the KSA.

Ismail and Mujani (2012)demonstrate in their study that Malaysia needs improved and credible inter-faith platforms to strengthen the inter-faith harmony for cohesive society and national integration. In my view, the role of religious discourse is very vital in this regard. Only the moderate religious discourse can bring the long-lasting inter-faith harmony whichever the state is, whichever the society is. Zulkarnain and Samsuri (2018) have the viewpoint that the religious leaders play a vital role in creating and maintaining interfaith harmony and religious tolerance in Indonesian society. They are of the view that the religious conflict will trigger more likely if the social actors don't recognize and play their positive and constructive role.

Kayaoglu (2015)agues in his study that the Islamic actors both at the state and societal level, in most of the Islamic countries, started inter-faith dialogue because they want to show their moderate stance to powerful others who are concerned about the religious conflicts and peace of the world. Al-nuaimy (2018) is of the view that moderate religious discourse is a discourse that preaches morality, adheres to objectivity in preaching, and avoids extremism. He further states that the Islamic religious discourse should be under the control and responsibility of specialized religious institutions so that the discourse may become mature and moderate.

Eldin (2014) concludes in his paper that Amr Khalid, an Egyptian preacher, used certain specific ideological modes such as narrativization, unification, standardization and symbolization in his Islamic sermons to covey his ideology strongly. He uses rationalization, universalization and strategy of pathos for persuading his audience. He has analyzed the sermons of Amr Khalid with special focus on ideology, modality and persuasion.

There are some studies that conclude that the rhetoric is going on and narrative is being built about Islamic terrorism, radicalism, and extremism both at local level in Muslim states and at global level (Mamdani 2005). Extremist Muslims are said to have burnt Christian churches and pork butcheries in Tanzania (Wijsen 2009). Extremist Muslims are said to have bombed hotels in Bali and Jakarta (Wijsen 2009). The researcher believes that such rhetoric and discourse give an impression that radicalization is inherently connected to Islam. The religious discourse of Muslim scholars needs to be analyzed from a positive angle using PDA as a complementary approach to CDA and research methodology. This is why the researcher intends to analyze the religious discourse of Muslim scholars from a positive perspective.

Material and Methods

In this study, PDA as an approach within CDA has been employed to analyze and identify the ideological moderation in the religious discourse of the Muslim scholars from a positive standpoint. PDA is a complementary approach to CDA. PDA, according to its pioneer Jim Martin (2004) highlights the positive, productive and progressive role of

discourse to contribute to society positively instead of focusing on the power dynamics in the discourse. Likewise, Bartlett (2017) is of the view that PDA is a complementary approach to CDA which focusses on investigating discourse to highlight the strategies of unification to advance and achieve collective goals such as cohesion, reconciliation, and peace. According to him, PDA looks at the discourse from the lens to investigate the socio-political conflicts and solve them to create harmony in the world. Macgilchrist, (2007) believes that PDA describes what texts 'do well' and 'get right' in our eyes.

The study population is the Muslim scholars whose discourse is directly addressed to their audience in English as well as being moderate in nature. The study has a purposive sampling design which is more common in qualitative researches. When the purposive strategy is used in qualitative research, a predetermined number of participants are selected who, in the judgment of the researcher, are most likely to provide the information required for the study. (Kumar, 2018). In this study, Muslim scholars and their speeches/discourses are selected purposively and they are those whose religious discourses are moderate in nature having themes such as interfaith harmony, religious tolerance, morality, and peace as per the judgment of the researcher and their moderate discourse positively contributes to society being away from the binaries of US vs THEM. These speeches have been analyzed using PDA, which is the complementary approach to CDA, as a methodology. The names of the scholars are Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, Mufti Ismail ibn Musa Menk, Omar Suleiman, and Dr. Bilal Philips. Al-nuaimy (2018) is of the view that moderate religious discourse is a discourse that preaches morality, adheres to objectivity in preaching, and avoids extremism.

Results and Discussion

This sections contains the analysis of the speeches of Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, Mufti Ismail ibn Musa Menk, Omar Suleiman, and Dr. Bilal Philips. These speeches were directly addressed to the audience in English. These speeches are available on YouTube as secondary data. The translation/transcription of the selected religious discourses/speeches is auto-generated translation of YouTube.

Extract 1: (From Speech of Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri on Peace for Humanity)

"You belong and proclaim to be a Muslim. The Muslim is supposed toestablish peace. It is important to provide peace to the society. Muslim is the promoter and protector of peace. The Muslim is the demonstration of peace. Any person who works against peace and security has no link with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and the teachings of the Holy Quran."

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=biCJ_qVA-eQ)

Extract 2: (From Speech of Mufti Menk on Interfaith Relations)

"We need to educate ourselves as Muslims. And for this reason, the first verses of revelation we all know were 'iqra' which means read and reading is closely connected to education. So it is extremely important, especially in today's times, that we understand that we should never look at the non-Muslims as our enemies. And we must understand in Islam we need to work on those who hate Islam and the Muslims, we need to reduce this enmity."

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvYIxhkbrBc

Extract 3: (From Speech of Omar Suleiman on Harmonizing Religion)

"Islam has been a religion of peace and the religion which the majority of Muslims hold and believe in today is the same religion. The issue is only their ability to implement it. The power is no longer in their hands. From the period of colonization, another force came into the world colonization with an iron fist where religions were suppressed."

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OXHBYB92ik
Extract 4: (From Speech of Bilal Philips on Peace)

"The world peaceful coexistence is exemplified in Spain. The people need to study the history of Spain when Salahuddin entered Jerusalem. When Salahuddin took Jerusalem and Palestine, what did he do? Tit for tat, an eye for an eye? No, he followed the example of Prophet Muhammad and let the people free to worship. Christians, Jews, and Muslims worshipped together not in the same places of worship but in their own places living together and worshiping peacefully."

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUtzCzD3t8A

Discussion

The above quoted extracts reflect the positive aspect of the religious discourse of Muslim scholars. Extract 1 depicts that Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri emphasizes the importance of peace. He says that it is the duty of the Muslims to establish peace in society. He further narrates that the Muslims are promoter and protector of peace. He is of the view that he who works against the peace goes against the teachings of the Holy Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The analysis of Extract 2 reveals that Mufti Menk stresses the need for Muslims to engage in positive interactions with the people of other religions, focusing on shared values and commonalities. He cites the verses from Quran for the Muslims to become educated so that they might reduce the enmity and hate of the followers of other faiths against the Muslims. This is how he stresses on interfaith harmony.

Extract 3 clearly presents Islam as a religion of peace, not conflict. Omar Suleiman highlights that the believers of Islam are peaceful. He further opines that the real spirit of Islam is peaceful. He blames colonizers to use Islam as tool to serve their purposes by damaging its true essence. In Extract 4, Dr. Bilal Philips asserts that Islam is a religion of peace. He quotes Spain under Muslim rule. He beautifully sums up the peaceful coexistence of Christians, Jews and Muslims in Muslim Spain.

In the end, these scholars' speeches promote a message of peace, tolerance, and understanding, encouraging Muslims to be active agents of interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence with the believers of other faiths.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the critical research problem of religious discourse of Muslim scholars. It is generally believed that the religious discourse of Muslim scholars is radical in nature posing a great threat to peace bot at local and global level. The primary objective of this study was to highlight the themes of moderation in religious discourse of Muslim scholars.

Key findings indicate that there are some Muslim scholars whose discourses are always moderate and reformative. They always persuade their audiences for positive and reformative actions such as peace and interfaith harmony. Their moderate discourse has

considerable positive implications for peace, particularly at global level. Additionally, the research underscores that all the religious discourses radical in nature. The analysis also revealed that the religious discourse of Muslim scholars focuses on interfaith dialogue so that all the religious communities may co-exist peacefully.

The implications of these findings are profound. They underline the urgent need for the Muslim states to control the religious institution as religion is as an important social institution that produces and controls religious discourse. Moreover, the study contributes to existing literature by highlighting the positive and reformative content from the religious discourse of Muslim scholars.

This research acknowledges some limitations. The limited data has been analyzed in this paper. Additionally, the analysis has qualitative methods that are not as reliable as the quantitative methods are. Future research studies should focus on refining the research regarding religious discourse of Muslims scholars using bigger data sets and mixed method approaches for more reliable, insightful and empirical findings. These investigations would enrich the current understanding of religious discourse and significantly contribute to policy formation for peace and interfaith harmony on the planet.

In conclusion, the moderate and reformative religious discourses of Muslim scholars are essential for global peace and interfaith harmony so that all the religious communities may live in the peaceful co-existence.

Recommendations

Finally on the basis of results, certain recommendations are made in relation to religious discourse of Muslim Scholars. These recommendations may be valuable for the peace-building through interfaith harmony and interfaith dialogue. The study recommends that these moderate discourses can be used by peace organizations that working for interfaith harmony and peace-building. It is also recommended that such moderate discourses should be encouraged and promoted by the governments. These moderate discourses should also be highlighted by media houses so that religious extremism and radicalization may be dissuaded.

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