Sustaining Tolerance According to Brenda Almond's "Education for Tolerance": An Analysis from Islamic Perspective

Mohd Faizal, A.K[1], Muhammad Syahid, Ahmad[2],
Mohd. Khairul Nizam Zainan Nazri[3]

[1,2,] *(Faculty of Islamic Studies, Kolej Universiti Islam Sultan Azlan Shah, Malaysia)*
[3]*(Facultyof Quran and Sunnah, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Malaysia)*

Abstract: *Brenda Almond in her article entitled "Education for Tolerance: Cultural Difference and Family Values" highlighted four crucial concepts and their relationship in cultivating tolerance. She analysed the concept of tolerance, liberty, popular morality and militant secularism in the light of contemporary pluralistic western background. The concepts and values as expounded by Almond are also shared by the eastern pluralistic society to some extent. This study therefore seeks to analyse Almond's notions on these concepts, particularly in relation to its accuracy and conformity to Islamic teaching. The study concluded that Almond's notion of the concept conforms to Islamic perspective at the exoteric level with certain limitations for each specific concept. The similarities therefore unveiled another platform where mutual understanding between worldviews and religions could be nurtured and applied thereof, especially in the pluralistic society of Malaysia. Further study could also be replicated from other religious point of view.*
Keywords: *Brenda Almond, Islam; Secularism; Tolerance; Liberty; Morality*

I.   Introduction

Tolerance is one of the most vital elements in a pluralistic society (U N E S C O, pp. 11).. Sustaining tolerance is not easy to realize, however is not impossible to be actualized. Brenda Almond in her article entitled Education for Tolerance: Cultural Difference and Family Values had discussed the issue of educating tolerance in the pluralistic society of Europe and America. Although Almond had confined her discussion in the article to education, it is found that her discussion on tolerance has gone beyond education to the challenges faced by the society in sustaining tolerance. She had pointed out two challenges that obstruct the establishment of tolerance in the society. The first challenge is the individual liberty and the second is the rise of militant form of secularism. The first challenge leads to the need for establishing of popular morality while the latter denotes deliberate confrontation by secularist with all mainstream religions that need to be resolved. Almond's view in her article triggered significant reaction from certain sides that disagreed with her opinion (Lawrence Bloom, 2010). Hence, this article will revisit her discussion on the above mentioned issue which will be further examined extensively and critically from Islamic viewpoint.

II.   The Importance Of Tolerance

Almond (2010, pp. 133) in her article has described tolerance as the central pillar of the Western cultural heritage that had its root from the fifth century by the first expression given by Pericles, an Athenian statesman. She also described tolerance as a key value of current western political democracy.

To this point, Islam also admits the important significance of tolerance. As a matter of fact, tolerance in Islam has an ideological basis in Quran and the teachings of the Prophet, Muhammad and it is not subject to any human interference (al-Kahtani, 2008, pp. 60). From Islam point of view, tolerance is something inborn as it is created within human as their pure creation (fitrah) and their nature of life (Sayyid Qutb, v. 1, pp. 253). In conjunction with that, Islam approves the differences among human in all aspects of their lives as stated in Surah Hud: 118:

If Thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people: but they will not cease to dispute.

The differences include the entire aspects of human life (Al-Fakh al-Razi, v. 8, pp. 486)(Sayyid Qutub, v. 1, pp. 194). On this premise, Ahmad Shafi'i Ma'arif (2011) urged that people should not regard the existing differences and religious diversity as the cause of conflict because religious diversity is a God's will which is inevitable. Instead of considering it a reason for fighting each other, people should regard it as potential factor for cooperation in beneficial programmes (Ahmad Najib Burhani, 2011, pp. 331). As argued by Osman Bakar (2006, pp. 21), this fact can be deduced from the interpretation of a Quranic verse in Surah al-Baqarah: 148:

To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good. Where so ever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah hath power over all things.

It can be concluded therefore that Islam demands humanities to celebrate differences. Our willingness to accept others as they are is the key for tolerance.

III. The Concept Of Liberty

Engaging in a crucial debate on tolerance, Almond begun her discussion with a very brief and concentrated debate and argumentation on the concept of liberty between two Western thinkers namely J. S. Mill and Patrick Devlin. Mill's opinion is to give a wider freedom to a person by objecting what he called "the tyranny of majority" and setting the limits of liberty only where one person's liberty could bring harm or hurt to somebody else. Mill (1859, pp. 13) stressed the underlying principle of freedom as quoted in his On Liberty: "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereignty."

On the other hand, Patrick Devlin asserted the limitation of individual freedom by stressing on the importance of society as an institution that has to be protected by the law. Thus, the individual liberty is restricted by the interest of the society. He affirmed in his Enforcement of Morals (pp. 14) that "freedom to do what you know to be bad is worthless (Chien Liew Ten). Devlin further stressed on the need for popular morality that should be the arbiter of law.

Based on the first conception and as endorsed by the Wolfenden Report, United Kingdom (UK) has facilitated and approved many activities that were originally banned in the Western community including decriminalization of homosexuality and prostitution. The latter opinion, insisted that liberty should be limited according to the common ethical perspective in UK that was originally based on belief in the God of the Bible. The latter view is supported by Almond (2010) to some extend.

Islam does not accept liberty and freedom without restriction. In order for human to obtain freedom, they have to be disciplined and nurtured in the sense that they understand the fact that they have to has a limit in everything. Freedom without limitation is not a true freedom but rather an illusion of freedom (Tariq Ramadan, 2012). As stated by D. P. Verma (2014, pp. 85) that the law is established to make a balance between the security of the society on one hand and individual liberty on the other. Therefore, individual liberty can not be achieved unless a restriction or limitation in the form of law is created. The restriction on liberty and freedom in the form of morality is not just vital for social security but also has it impact on the economic growth. Emmanuel (2014, pp. 73) concluded that imperatively the adherence to moral values is a key indicator to achieving economic development in a nation. Individual values and behaviors have been proven to be key factor that promotes economic performance. Therefore if moral values are promoted, the economy will also perform well since the economy cannot be separated from the people. Hence, limitation and restriction to the liberty and freedom are accepted generally by human to give away for social security and economic prosperity.

Islam had enacted necessary laws that restrict human behavior to certain limitation for their own benefit and wellbeing. Therefore, Islam denounces those who follow their desire and lust as mentioned in the following verse 59 from Surah Maryam:

But after them there followed a posterity who missed prayers and followed after lusts soon, then, will they face destruction,-

Hence, the notion expressed by Mill is not acceptable from Islamic perspective. Moreover, when it had been proved for being a cause of creating chaos in European society (Almond, 2010). However, restricting people only to obey the religion of the majority as proposed by Devlin is also unacceptable from Islamic point of view. Having said that, the paper will further analyze what Almond expressed – asserting Devlin's opinion - as Popular Morality.

IV. Popular Morality

Popular Morality can be understood as the custom of the majority in a society. However, as stated by Priyanka Chaudhary (2013, pp. 76) that morality is closely linked to ethical behavior. It can be defined as the standards that an individual or a group has about what is right and wrong, or good and evil. In connection with the fact, the custom of the majority can be understood as general acceptance of the majority on what is good and evil or what can be do and what should be restrained.

Almond had emphasized on the need for Popular Morality as it had been proposed by Devlin. As Devlin gave strong emphasis on the concept, he suggested that in the context of UK, all members of society should follow Christianity. On Devlin word: "A non Christian is bound by it, not because it is part of Christianity but because, rightly or wrongly, it has been adopted by the society in which he lives…if he wants to live in the house, he must accept it as built in the way in which it is." Devlin argues that a society's existence depends on the maintenance of shared political and moral values (Chien Liew Ten). Discussing the situation in UK, Almond (2010, p. 136) used the term 'host societies' describing the Christendom society in Western Europe as the basis for the Popular Morality.

Almond (2010) showed how negligence of popular morality in the Western Europe had resulted in the division within the host society itself that eventually demolished the fundamentals of tolerance. In this regard, she advanced some relevant examples such as changing notion of the society from marriage to cohabitation, from biological understanding of family to social and legal construction of partnership and parenthood. On the other hand, the emergence of emigrants with new religions had strengthened the argument that the concept of popular majority is essential to prevent the division within society.

In general, Islam established custom as a source of Islamic law and that it constitutes a significant Islamic legal maxim (al-Nadwi, 2011, p. 293) as follows:

Customary usage is the determining factor
In relation to the above, Islam ordered Muslims to respect the custom of other people and to abide by the rule of the law. Prophet Yusof had demonstrated how a Muslim can interact and live within a non-Muslim society while practicing Islam at the same time (The Quran: Surah Yusuf).

The problem resulting from the concept of Popular Morality as described by Devlin is that the concept had reinforced people of other religions to follow the religion of the majority. This is in contradiction with the basic teaching of Islam as the Quran confirms freedom of religion without any compulsion (Ibn Kathir, v. 1, pp. 682.) as stated in Surah al-Baqarah: 256:

Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error: Whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. and Allah heareth and knoweth all things

In the Islamic government of Medina, Prophet Muhammad had ordered the Jews to grasp with the Law of Moses instead of the Islamic law. People of other religions are not required to follow Islamic law as long as they follow the laws of their own religion. Prophet Muhammad has been quoted as saying (Sunan Abi Dawud: Bab Rajm al-Yahudiyyin):

Indeed I judge by what is in the Taurat (for the Jews who committed adultery)
Another important point to be addressed is that relying only on the custom is not a concrete foundation as custom may change over time. The changing of custom had been admitted by Almond herself as in one of her article, Almond (2011) said: "The contemporary attempt to re-shape views and customs as far as that debate is concerned is a surprisingly recent innovation." Furthermore, she (2011 The Right to Disagree: Challenging the New Orthodoxy About the Family) challenged what she call as "the new arising custom". But by doing so, she explicitly admitted her view had become or will become the "unpopular morality".

From Islamic point of view the underlying foundation of a society must be built upon the basic teaching of the religion itself not the custom. Although, as mentioned before, Islam admits the authority of custom as a source of Islamic law, it overrules any custom that contradicts the divine revelation (al-Nadwi, 2011, p. 298). The Quran had stated the authority of the two sources of revelation namely the Quran and the Narration of the Prohpet Muhammad as stated in Surah al-Nisa': 59:

O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may Take away part of the dower ye have given them,-except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good.

V.   Militant Form Of Secularism
The term secularism was first coined in 1846 by George Jacob Holyoake (English Secularism, pp. 60) in order to describe "a form of opinion which concerns itself only with questions, the issues of which can be tested by the experience of this life" (Austin Cline). The meaning of secular is obscure (Mac Lennan, pp. 27). Literally, the word secular means "of this world" in Latin and is the opposite of religious (Austin Cline). There is no essential meaning either of secularity or of it opponent, the religion. Even secular views of the secular aren't all the same (Mac Lennan, pp. 27). In the words of Austin Cline (2015), "Despite its importance, there isn't always a great deal of agreement on just what secularism really is". However, Lyon fixed that "secularization has to do with the splitting apart of church and state which has occurred since medieval times" (Pius, 2013, pp. 33). From Islamic point of view, al-Attas (1993, p. 17) gave the definition of secularization as the deliverance of man, first from religious and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language.

Almond had divided the secularist into two forms; who are opponent to religion and others are not opponent to religion. Describing the militant form of secularism, Almond (2011) stated: "The problem lies with the form of secularism that is essentially intolerant of religion in any form and also intolerant of any disagreement with its own 'way of life' agenda." Helene Cristini (2014, pp. 174) clarifies that "secular fundamentalism (militant form) just like the religious one who claims the truth and it excludes all types of

religious sensibility in the realm of culture. It takes on three forms which are scientism, utilitarianism and nihilism that rejects what is different".

From Almond (2011) point of view, the secularist had used the generalized principle of toleration of diversity (non-discrimination) to criminalize religious and moral objections to practices about which it is quite possible for opinions to differ. In other words, tolerance has been turned on its head. Lord Carey of Clifton (2010) asserted that it is only within the last ten years or so that people had witnessed the rise of a militant form of secularism which places itself deliberately in confrontation with all mainstream faiths. Once the focus was on philosophical debates about the existence of God; now the focus has shifted to issues of lifestyle and conduct.

Aggressive form of secularism can be observed contemporarily in Muslim countries. This is considered the effect of the secular trend on the concept of man run through Western discipline in the humanities (Harun Yahya, 2002). No doubt, western secular civilization has caused a radical change in the Muslim world, particularly in its political and educational domains. For example, the recent occasion in Bangladesh where a third majority of its Muslim population had underwent a massive transition from predominantly a liberal Muslim society to a "uniquely secular" society. Secular administration in Bangladesh had created a reign of terror throughout the country wherein political vendetta, establishing torture cells in educational institutions, rapes, mounting violence, and murders have become a regular phenomenon (Md Saidul Islam, 2011).

In Islam there is no between religious life and secular life, church and state, as there is in Christianity. The unitary perspective of Islam is rooted in the metaphysical principle of tawhid in which all aspects of life are within the power of the Almighty God (Yasien Mohamed, 1998). Islam affirms the perfectness of the religion that includes all aspects of human life in Surah al-Maidah: 3:

This Day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.

Therefore Islam is contrary to the concept of secularism that separates human from religion. It orders Muslims to abide by the rules of religion entirely (Rashid Reda, v. 2, pp. 205) as persuaded by Surah al-Baqarah: 208:

O ye who believe! enter into Islam whole-heartedly; and follow not the footsteps of the evil one; for he is to you an avowed enemy.

Islam also denounces the aggressive form of secularism that forces others to follow only its own doctrine. Even though Islam prescribes itself as the only true religion, it sit hold to the concept of no compulsion in religion. For each individual has the choice of his own. The Quran in Surah al-Kafirun: 6 had stated:
To you be your way, and to me mine.

Almond's statement which rejected the militant form of secularism is totally aligned with Islamic principal. Beyond that, Islam rejected secularism from the beginning neither it is a militant form of secularism nor the liberal form of secularism.

VI.   Conclusion

Brenda Almond had tremendously made a very remarkable critics on the current issue related to tolerance in Europe. The challenges faced by the society concerning tolerance had been addressed accordingly. This study confirmed some divergence and convergence aspects between Brenda Almond and the Islamic teaching. However the convergence elements are much obvious. As far as the discussion is concern, from Islamic point of view, two fundamental elements are very essential to be underlined; the sovereignty of the revelation and the concept of no compulsion in religion. Further study could also be replicated from other religious point of view.

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