Social Tolerance in Bangladesh: Current Level and Methods of Progress

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ABSTRACT

Tolerance is harmony in difference. This paper discussed about current level of tolerance in Bangladesh and means for its development along with a rigorous review of some studies relating to tolerance. This study used both primary and secondary data being both quantitative and qualitative. For primary data 62 university students both from home and abroad were selected. The nature of the study is descriptive and it follows tabular technique for analysis of data and presentation of output. The review revealed that tolerance has been given due importance in literatures of UNESCO and other organizations and researchers. All of them mentioned tolerance as an inseparable part of social peace and proposed several measures to enhance level of tolerance in the society. The study found that economic status has the highest level of tolerance (75.00%) while sexual orientation has the lowest (20.20%). Further it revealed that religious tolerance is higher than the political tolerance. The overall tolerance level was found to be 54.03%. Presence of diversity, education, progressing status and cultural acceptance were identified as means of developing tolerance in the society but education was the most important.

INTRODUCTION

There are a lot of problem in the world such as terrorism, war, hunger, poverty, unemployment etc. If the major problems can be categorized a mother problem can be found named, intolerance. Because of intolerance there are wars, war creates unemployment, unemployment creates hunger and poverty, poverty damages the education and health services. All of these create a huge human insecurity and violate human rights. But if there is tolerance in society people would enjoy freedom and move toward progress. According to the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "all individuals and groups have the right to be different, to consider themselves as different and to be regarded as such". Tolerance is important for peace, economic and social development (UNESCO, 1995). So it is very important for human development to ensure tolerance in the society. A tolerant society is a society which consists of love, forgiveness, cooperation, support, harmony, sacrifice, respect, less punishment and

all kinds of positive virtues. This society will reject all kinds of negative virtues such as arrogance, jealous, hardness, cruelty, illegal possessiveness and so on.

Tolerance can be better understood through three concepts and they are social tolerance, culture of acceptance and presence of diversity. Social Tolerance or simply tolerance is one of the noble virtues of human being which helps one to accept, love, forgive, support, sacrifice and cooperate with the diversity available in the society. "Tolerance is a flawed virtue for a flawed society" (Schuyt, 2001). It is considered as "integral and essential" for the society and peace (UNESCO, 1994). It is also considered as one of the important elements of democracy with peace and human rights. The opposite word of tolerance is intolerance which starts from controversial matters. It can be seen in politics, religion, ethnicity, race, etc. Intolerance first becomes stated with individual but gradually it takes a combined shape of society. Social intolerance is the sum total of individual intolerances. "Bigotry, stereotyping, stigmatizing, insults and racial jokes are examples of individual

expression of intolerance" (Doorn, 2018). Intolerance breeds intolerance. Culture of acceptance means an established culture which forces people to accept the system willingly or unwillingly. It means the culture of accepting diversity. In cosmopolitan cities there is a culture of accepting diversity and people willingly or unwillingly accept the diversity. On the other hand, presence of diversity means the availability of diversity. There are some places where only one kind of object is available and there are some places where different kinds of object are available. For example, in a rose garden there are only rose but in a flower garden there are different kinds of flowers. The flower garden has the presence of diversity and is a mark of tolerance.

Tolerance is an inseparable element of social peace. Social peace increases with increase in the level of tolerance. So, it is essential to have understanding about meaning and level of tolerance and means of its development in the society. With this view in mind, this study has been undertaken with objective of measuring current level of tolerance and finding out ways for its development along with as rigorous review of literatures relating to tolerance.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical framework

Theoretical test makes a study stronger. Specific theories have not been found to justify the study but the following two social theories have been found somehow relevant to this research.

Uncertainty Avoidance: It is the fourth dimension of culture given by Hofstede (2018). This theory says that "uncertainty avoidance (UA) dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity". "Countries exhibiting strong UAI maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior, and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas". "On the other hand weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles". Strong UA is one of the main factors behind intolerance. On the other hand weak UA is one of the main factors of tolerance. Hofstede Insight shows that in the category of UA

Bangladesh, Iraq, Malaysia and the United Kingdom scored 60, 85, 36 and 35 respectively. Iraq is now one of the most vulnerable country having war and terrorism. Bangladesh is also highly experienced of violence and extremism. On the other hand United Kingdom and Malaysia are well-known as developed countries having good democracy, trust, love and respect. This data provides us a clear message that the countries belong to high UA are more prone to violence and extremism on the other hand the countries belong low UA are more prone to love and respect.

Looking glass self

This theory says that development of one's self and of one's identity go through one's interpersonal interactions within the context of society (Wikipedia,n.d). It depends on three basic ideas: "we imagine how we must appear to others, we imagine and react to what we feel their judgment of that appearance must be and we develop our self through the judgments of others". According to this theory, in a tolerant society even a highly intolerant person cannot express his/her ugly attitudes towards diversity because of society. Gradually the intolerant people accept the culture of tolerance and become habituated with it.

Data and analytical technique

The study used both primary and secondary data being both quantitative and qualitative. Ethical issues of research were maintained strongly. Sixty two students including both male and female constituted the sample of primary data among which 60 were from Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University and the rest 2 were studying in Malaysia and Turkey. Respondents were selected following purposive sampling technique and direct interview; case study were done for collecting primary data. As the students get admitted from different parts of the country they can be considered as the representative of the whole country. Secondary sources of information include related web sites, books, newspaper, documentary, etc. Basically this study is of descriptive nature and followed tabular technique for analysis of data and presentation of output.
All quotations of respondents were translated from Bengali.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Tolerance in different literatures

Reviewing relevant literatures makes a study stronger. To make the study stronger three literatures have been reviewed. There are a lot of literatures regarding tolerance but following three are highly relevant and effective to explain tolerance in the present study.

Review 1: UNESCO (1994) termed tolerance as the threshold of peace and a teaching/learning guide for education for peace, human rights and democracy (Table 1). The objectives of the study were

● "To educate our children and young people with a sense of openness and comprehension, towards other people, their diverse cultures and histories and their fundamental shared humanity.
● To teach them the importance of refusing violence and adopting peaceful means for resolving disagreements and conflicts.
● To forge in the next generation feelings of altruism, openness and respect toward others, solidarity and sharing based on a sense of security in one's own identity and a capacity to recognize the many dimensions of being human in different cultural and social contexts".

To address the objectives it was suggested to "set up a week of events to celebrate the diverse groups" in community through which tolerance among the community members will be increased. It also suggested religious organizations to celebrate "programs on religious tolerance holding interreligious dialogues and set up guidelines for teaching interreligious respect in the community schools". The study also termed intolerance as a social illness which can be removed through practicing democracy. Democracy provides the opportunity of participation which creates the chance to share thoughts and views. Sharing thoughts and views brings tolerance. The indicators of intolerance identified were "war, conflict between religious groups and ethnic groups, minority and majority conflict, gender oppression, abuse of children, etc. Further, language, stereotyping, prejudice, teasing, scapegoating, discrimination", etc. were

mentioned as symptoms smoothing the path of intolerance. Sometimes intolerance becomes more acute and takes horrible shape like "sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, fascism, xenophobia, imperialism", etc. Media violence is also a great problem because violent scenes have a great impact over the young children. They create hates among peoples' mind. After all of these, some hopeful signs are mentioned in the study which are "language, public order, social relation, political process, cultural events and manifestation, religious practices, inter-group cooperation", etc. These hopeful signs smooth the path of tolerance.

Table 1
Major aspects of tolerance in different literatures.

Review No.	Author	Concept about tolerance	Main objective	Means to enhance tolerance
1	UNESCO (1994)	Threshold of peace	Educating tolerance among students and others	Education, teaching and democracy
2	Marjoka van Doorn (2018)	Accepting the disliked	Analyzing nature, antecedents and dynamics of tolerance	Stability, peace and research
3	UNESCO (1995)	Protecting human right and freedom	Declaring principles of tolerance	Freedom of press, education, access to information, committed implementation of principles

Review 2: Marjoka van Doorn (n.d) dealt with nature, antecedents and dynamics of tolerance. The author termed tolerance as accepting disliked (Table 1). The author also coined tolerance as the invention of Europe. Its root was repression but the need for stability and peace finally brought tolerance. Tolerance doesn't mean only religious tolerance rather it means tolerance to all diversities including race, gender, politics, etc.

With reference to Vogt (1997), the author mentioned three kinds of tolerance which are **political tolerance**- tolerance towards acts in the public sphere such as giving a speech, demonstration, distributing leaflets, organizing meetings, and so on; **moral tolerance**- tolerance

towards most typically and controversially events in recent decades like living in sin, pornography, homosexuality, abortion, etc.; and **social tolerance**- tolerance towards accepting people of ascriptive characteristics such as skin color, language, etc. For measuring political tolerance, the author identified four primary predictors referring Sullivan and Transue (1999) which are education, democratic belief, perception of threat and personality. The author then suggested five determinants of tolerance as socioeconomic status, age, regional differences, religion and gender.

Finally the author urged the importance of having more and more research on tolerance.

Review 3: In promoting tolerance, UNESCO (1995) declared the principles on tolerance. According to UNESCO tolerance is about protecting human rights and freedom of people and suggested somerequisites for maintaining tolerance- law, education, and access to information, awareness and local solution. Law is required to reduce hate, crime and discrimination against minorities. It is also necessary to get access to courts, human rights commissioners or ombudsmen to get justice and dispute resolution. Which law cannot, education can. It teaches people to be tolerated to diversity, open minded, respectful to human rights and others' culture. Intolerant persons often misguide people with misinformation, prejudice and statistics. To reduce this problem UNESCO suggested ensuring freedom of press and access to information for all. Awareness should be initiated from individual as intolerance grows in mind first. One need to ask oneself, "Am I a tolerant person?" This question will help individual to be tolerant to others. If individuals become tolerant then gradually the whole society will be tolerant to others. Intolerance should be nipped in the bud. It should be addressed when it is local or even individual. Government or global community cannot solve problem but individual can. One should not wait for the government action to remove the intolerance from the society rather one should take initiative to form a local network with people who are willing to establish tolerance in society.

UNESCO has taken the following strategies to combat intolerance:

● "Development of scientific research and reflection on the phenomena of racism, discrimination and xenophobia.
● Revision and/or revitalization of UNESCO's instruments dealing with racism and discrimination.
● Development of new educational approaches, elaboration of teaching materials and establishment of indicators.
● Mobilization of opinion leaders and political decision-makers against racism and discrimination.
● Preservation of diversity in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies.
● Combating racist propaganda in media especially in cyberspace".

Further, UNESCO thinks tolerance is harmony in difference. It mentioned education is an efficient means to bring tolerance in the society. It suggests state and the society to be committed to implement various measures for making the country a tolerant one (Table1). UNESCO declared 16 November as "International Tolerance Day".

Results of analysis

This sub section is the output of the interview and case study done with the respondents. The results are summarized in Table 2 and discussed subsequently.

Table 2
Current level of tolerance.

Diversity	Tolerance (%)
Cultural Tolerance	**43.80**
Language tolerance	39.20
Regional tolerance	50.60
Ethnic tolerance	41.60
Ideological Tolerance	**45.50**
Religious tolerance	57.60
Political tolerance	33.40
Class Tolerance	**72.60**
Economic class	75.00
Social class	70.20
Biological Tolerance	**54.20**
Color	65.40
Structure	50.80
Disability	73.20
Sex	61.40
Sexual orientation	20.20
Total Tolerance	**54.03**

Tolerance (friendship) depends on cultural similarity

It has been found that friendship or close relationship depends on similarity of culture. People may not be intolerant to diversity but they want similar people to make friendship. This was supported by the comment of a respondent. He said, "Friendship is about trust. I trust and feel comfortable with those who are like me. But I am not intolerant to others. I feel comfortable to talk with people who have same mentality." Another respondent said, "I like people who like me. I don't like people who don't like me. I have different kinds of friend but important points are culture, ideology and character that are common among us." Major similarities are language, region and ethnic similarities. Data show that 43.80% respondents like those who have similar culture (Table 2). During friendship they also consider mentality, nature and status.

Religious tolerance is higher than political tolerance

Though generally it is thought that politically people are more tolerant than that of religion but in the study it was found that people in Bangladesh can tolerate religious diversity more than that of political one. Data show that 33.40% tolerate political diversity while 57.60% tolerate religious diversity (Table 2). In Bangladesh political ideologies are so much confrontational. This was supported by a respondent. According to him, "Though I am Muslim I have no problem to be a friend of a Hindu or Christian. I usually go to their religious occasions and participate with them. But I am not allowed by my party to participate in a program of rival party. I really don't like the opposition party and the party men." Another respondent said, "The present media, society and government teach us to be tolerant to religion. There is a very popular concept in Bangladesh that "Religion is the festival of everybody". But the political culture is highly intolerant. Top leaders are highly intolerant and always criticize rival party then how will be the followers tolerant? Because of political clashes hundreds of people die every year but it is not taken by people seriously. It has become as usual as leaders create intolerance."

Economic class has the highest tolerance level

In Bangladesh though there are people from diversified economic backgrounds they can easily match each other. Generally it is seen that rich people have poor friend and they can continue it. The data also show that 75.00% people don't have any problem to make friendship with a person belong to other economic class (Table 2). A respondent's comment supports this. She said, "My father is a businessman and we are belonging to upper middle class. But I have friends from very poor class. I have all kinds of friends. I don't think the economic class is a problem at all."

Lowest tolerance to diversified sexual orientation

In Bangladesh homosexuality is prohibited. People consider them as disable and hardly accept homosexual as friend. Data show that only 20.20% think they can choose a homosexual as friend (Table 2). People hate them mainly because of religious reason. A respondent said, "I generally like diversity and accept it but I cannot think a gay is my friend. Gays are ugly and naughty. They need treatment. My religion also doesn't support homosexuality."

Tolerance level is more than half

Tolerance level of all possible diversities available in society were measured and it was found that overall tolerance level was 54.03% (Table 2). So, Bangladesh should try to increase the level of tolerance to make the society a place of more peace and respect.

Methods to increase tolerance

In the research, respondents suggested four methods to increase tolerance in the society which are discussed below.

Presence of diversity

It is a highly influential factor to promote tolerance. Living together surely builds understanding among each other and helps to be closed. May be it is difficult to accept a different one very easily at the beginning but gradually it

becomes easy to accept the different. This is supported by the statement of one respondent that she said, "When I came here, first the local Malaysian people did not accept me as they don't know about me and it was same to me. If I convert it to percentage in their tolerance level, it would be 35.00%. I have already passed 5 years and now I have good understanding with them. I think the level is now 75.00%." Another interviewee said, "I have a Serb roommate. He is an irritating guy. First I could not tolerate him but gradually he has become my good friend." Data in Table 3 depict that presence of diversity can increase the level of tolerance by 20.00%.

Table 3
Methods for increasing tolerance.

Method	Tolerance enhancing capacity (%)	Rank
Presence of diversity	20.00	3
Education	30.00	1
Status	25.00	2
Culture of acceptance	20.00	3

Education

No doubt, education has a great impact on society. It creates openness and helps to broaden mind towards diversity. It is seen that educated people are more tolerant than illiterate. The developed countries where literacy rate is high, democracy and tolerance are also high. As no reliable tolerance index has been found, author had to depend on democratic data or indexes where it is seen that the country having more literacy rate, have the more democratic culture and development (Wikipedia, n.d). So, it can easily be said that education increases tolerance. This is supported by the statement of a respondent. He said, "Not only in Turkey but also in Bangladesh we see the people having good education tolerate the diversity. I said good education and not just degrees. The difference is clear between Bangladesh and Turkey. Literacy rate in Bangladesh is low and the educated persons are not so much qualitatively qualified. So generally they have limited scope to learn to be tolerant. On

the other hand people in Turkey are highly educated and they have qualified education. So they learnt tolerance towards diversity." The other respondent also supported the statement and said "In Bangladesh people show their high intolerance during election. Many people are being died. But in Malaysia people generally don't express their reaction. I have never seen political violence in Malaysia in last five years. May be education is a matter here. Here people are busy with their own job; they have limited time to invest in politics let alone violence. Uneducated people are unemployed and they create violence." Data in Table 3 depict that education can increase the level of tolerance by 30.00% and it is the most effective among the methods suggested by the respondents.

Status

Tolerance towards diversity highly depends on economic, social and political status. People cannot accept everyone easily. Similarity in status can easily accept the diversity. This is supported by the statement of a respondent from Turkey who said, "We found nationalist tolerate us very low. If I mark it, it is not more than 10 out of 100. They think we are taking away their jobs and opportunities. But the liberalist supports us and their tolerance to us is almost 80 out of 100." Another respondent also support this by her statement "Here (in Malaysia) people can tolerate easily and sometimes eagerly the rich and high class people from developed countries but they can hardly tolerate the people from under developed or poor countries. To the rich people from Middle East the tolerance level is 80-90 out of 100. On the other hand it is not more than 40 out of 100 to the people from under developed countries like Bangladesh." Enhancement in economic, social and political status can increase the level of tolerance by 25.00% (Table 3).

Culture of acceptance

It has a great influence over the people to be tolerated to others. This is supported by the statement of an interviewee who mentioned "I don't like free mixing of boys and girls. One day I saw a couple was kissing in train publicly. I was shocked but I did not express my reaction as the culture permits them to do this and forbid me to

forbid them." Another one said, "Generally Muslims don't go to non-halal restaurants in Malaysia. It is socially prohibited. But if I go to the non-halal restaurant even wearing hijab (showing Muslim icon) people don't react. They cannot do it as the society does not permit intolerance and reaction." Culture of acceptance can increase the level of tolerance by 20.00% (Table 3).

CONCLUSION

Though the number of intolerant people is less in society, the little number is enough to destroy the whole world. It is high time to stop intolerance and reduce the number gradually. All the four methods- presence of diversity, education, status and culture of acceptance, are necessary to develop the tolerance level. Though achieving these four elements in society is difficult, these are highly important. Basically education is very important to create an inner structure of tolerance. It is necessary to form the basement of a society while other three are necessary to decorate the culture of tolerance. Anyhow it is very necessary to ensure a tolerant society where people will enjoy real freedom. It should be one of the primary duties of all organs of state and society.

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