

Exploring Interfaith Marriages in Iran: A Comprehensive Analysis of Ayatollah Borujerdi's "Da'irat al-Ma'arif-i Islami"

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Abstract

The contentious subject of interfaith matrimonial unions has sparked considerable debate within Iran, notably drawing conservative sentiments from Ayatollah Borujerdi. The Ayatollah's conservative position, as expounded in his treatise "Da'irat al-Ma'arif-i Islami" (The Encyclopaedia of Islamic Knowledge), has elicited a strong response from the nation's youthful populace. This demographic, disenchanted with the Ayatollah's doctrinal stance, contends that interfaith marriages should be sanctioned, asserting that such unions foster comprehension and tolerance amidst diverse religious affiliations. Their argument posits that the spectrum of love ought not to be circumscribed by religious distinctions, advocating instead for individual autonomy in choosing marital partners.

Contrary to Ayatollah Borujerdi's conservative doctrinal underpinnings, this scholarly inquiry delves into the progressive impetus propelling Iranian youth towards advocating for a more inclusive societal paradigm that celebrates diversity and champions unity. This study systematically scrutinizes the prevailing discourse on interfaith matrimony in Iran, accentuating the catalytic role assumed by the nation's youth in steering the trajectory towards a more progressive and harmonious milieu. This research underscores the ongoing dialectic surrounding interfaith unions in the Iranian sociocultural milieu and appraises the transformative influence wielded by the younger generation in shaping the nation's trajectory towards a future characterized by pluralism and unity.

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Introduction

One of the significant Iranian books that oppose inter-faith marriages is "Da'irat al-Ma'arif-i Islami" (The Encyclopaedia of Islamic Knowledge), which was written by Ayatollah Borujerdi, a prominent Iranian Shia scholar and jurist, in the mid-twentieth century. In this book, Ayatollah Borujerdi discusses various aspects of Islamic law and ethics, including marriage. He argues that according to Islamic teachings, a Muslim is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim, and interfaith marriages are considered unlawful and invalid. He cites

several Quranic verses and hadiths to support his argument and concludes that interfaith marriages could lead to the corruption of Islamic values and practices (Rohrer, 2018).

Ayatollah Borujerdi's views on interfaith marriages are still influential among conservative Shia Muslims in Iran and other parts of the world. However, it is worth noting that there are many other Islamic scholars and jurists who have a more liberal and inclusive view of interfaith marriages and argue that they can be acceptable under certain conditions (Rohrer, 2018).

Reason of His Opporition against Interfaith Marriages

Ayatollah Borujerdi's conservative stance on interfaith marriages can be attributed to his interpretation of Islamic law and his concern for preserving the purity of the Islamic faith. According to his interpretation of Islamic law, a Muslim man or woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim because it is considered a violation of the Islamic principle of "din al-fitra", which means the natural religion. In his view, Islam is the only true and complete religion, and therefore, Muslims should not marry people who do not share their faith (Najfi, 2023).

Moreover, Ayatollah Borujerdi believed that interfaith marriages could lead to the corruption of Islamic values and practices. He argued that when Muslims marry non-Muslims, they may be influenced by their partner's beliefs and practices, which could lead to a dilution of Islamic teachings and traditions (Najfi, 2023).

In fact, Ayatollah Borujerdi's conservative views on interfaith marriages reflect the traditional and conservative nature of Shia Islam, which emphasizes the importance of preserving the purity of the faith and protecting it from external influences. However, it is worth noting that his views are not universally accepted among Islamic scholars and jurists, and there are many who have a more liberal and inclusive interpretation of Islamic law and ethics (Najfi, 2023).

To examin his views about interfaith marriages, this study firstly seek the factual concept of interfaith marriages have been emerged in various soceities across the globe.

Generalization about Interfaith Marriages in the Society

Interfaith marriage is a union between two individuals from different religious backgrounds. The concept of inter-faith marriage has been around for centuries, and it is becoming more common as the world becomes more interconnected. While it may seem like a progressive step towards unity, inter-faith marriages can also pose significant challenges to couples, families, and society as a whole (Pickard, 2022).

One of the main benefits of inter-faith marriage is that it can promote religious tolerance and understanding. It allows couples to learn more about each other's beliefs and practices and fosters respect for different religious traditions. Inter-faith marriages can also create a unique opportunity for individuals to develop a deeper understanding of their own faith by exploring it in the context of their partner's beliefs (Pickard, 2022).

However, interfaith marriages also present a range of challenges. One significant challenge is that couples may have different cultural and religious traditions, which can lead to conflicts in areas such as child-rearing, dietary restrictions, and holiday observances. These differences can be exacerbated if families on

either side do not approve of the marriage or if they have negative perceptions of the other partner's religion (Pickard, 2022).

Interfaith marriages also face potential difficulties when it comes to acceptance by religious institutions. Some religions may not recognize the validity of inter-faith marriages, or may require couples to undergo additional religious ceremonies or counseling. This can cause difficulties for couples who may feel that their union is not recognized by their respective faith communities (Hendricks, 2019).

Another issue that may arise in interfaith marriages is that couples may experience pressure from their families and communities to convert to their partner's religion. This can create significant stress and tension within the relationship and may lead to feelings of resentment or a loss of cultural identity (Hendricks, 2019).

Despite these challenges, inter-faith marriages continue to be a growing trend around the world. Many couples find that the benefits of sharing their lives with someone of a different faith outweigh the potential difficulties. To make these relationships work, couples must communicate openly and honestly about their beliefs and traditions, be respectful of each other's religious practices, and work together to find compromises that honor both partners' beliefs (Hendricks, 2019).

At the same time, interfaith marriages can be a positive force for religious tolerance and understanding. However, they require careful consideration and planning to ensure that couples can navigate the challenges that arise from their different cultural and religious backgrounds (Hendricks, 2019).

Evaluating the Trend of Interfaith Marriages in Iran

Interfaith marriage, which involves couples from different religious backgrounds, has become a topic of increasing interest in recent years. In Iran, a predominantly Muslim country, interfaith marriage is a complex and sensitive issue that is heavily influenced by cultural and religious norms (Aghajanian, 2018).

Interfaith marriages in Iran are relatively rare, with the majority of marriages being between individuals of the same faith. According to a survey conducted by the Iranian parliament, only 0.2% of marriages in Iran are between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the majority of these marriages are between Muslim men and non-Muslim women (Aghajanian, 2018).

One reason for the low incidence of interfaith marriage in Iran is the strong influence of religion and tradition. In Islam, marriage is considered a sacred bond between two people who share the same faith, and the Qur'an specifically prohibits Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men. Similarly, the traditional Iranian culture places a great emphasis on maintaining family and community unity, which is often achieved through the practice of endogamy, or marrying within one's own social and religious group (Aghajanian, 2018).

However, in recent years, there has been a growing trend of Iranian youth expressing interest in interfaith marriage, particularly among those who have had the opportunity to study and work abroad. This trend can be attributed to increased exposure to different cultures and beliefs, as well as changing attitudes towards marriage and relationships (Aghajanian, 2018).

Despite the growing interest in interfaith marriage, there are still many challenges that couples face in Iran. One major obstacle is the legal and bureaucratic process, which can be complicated and time-consuming. In Iran, marriages must be registered with the government, and the process can be more

difficult for interfaith couples, as they must obtain special permission from the authorities to marry (Aghajanian, 2018).

Furthermore, interfaith couples in Iran often face social stigma and discrimination from their families and communities. Families may be hesitant to accept a partner from a different faith, and there may be concerns about the impact of the marriage on family unity and religious identity. In some cases, interfaith couples may face harassment and violence from extremist religious groups (Aghajanian, 2018).

Iranian Theologists Recommending or Advising Interfaith Marriages

While many Iranian scholars and religious leaders generally discourage interfaith marriages, there are some who have expressed a more positive view on the matter. Some of these include;

1) Ayatollah Mohsen Kadivar

A prominent Shia scholar who has written extensively on Islamic law and ethics. He has argued that interfaith marriages can promote religious tolerance and understanding, and that Muslims can marry people of other Abrahamic faiths (i.e. Judaism and Christianity) without compromising their own beliefs (Aghajanian, 2018).

2) Ayatollah Abdol-Hamid Masoumi-Tehrani

Another Shia scholar who has written on Islamic jurisprudence and ethics. He has argued that interfaith marriages can promote peace and understanding between different religious communities and that Muslims can marry people of other Abrahamic faiths, as long as their partner accepts the basic principles of Islam (Aghajanian, 2018).

3) Seyyed Hossein Nasr

A philosopher and Islamic studies scholar who has taught at universities in Iran and the United States. Nasr has argued that interfaith marriages can promote a greater appreciation for religious diversity and can be a positive force for social harmony (Aghajanian, 2018).

It should be noted, however, that the views of these scholars are not universally accepted among Iranian religious leaders, and many continue to view interfaith marriages with skepticism or outright opposition. Additionally, while the Iranian government recognizes marriages between members of different Abrahamic faiths, marriages between Muslims and non-Abrahamic faiths (such as Hinduism or Buddhism) are not officially recognized (Aghajanian, 2018).

Concept of Interfaith Marriages in Religions other than Islam

Inter-faith marriages, also known as mixed marriages, refer to marriages between individuals who belong to different religious backgrounds. Here is a brief discussion of the concept of inter-faith marriages in some of the religions practiced in Iran;

- **Zoroastrianism**

In Zoroastrianism, inter-faith marriages are generally discouraged, as the religion places great emphasis on preserving the purity of the community's bloodline. However, some modern Zoroastrian scholars and practitioners have taken a more liberal approach, recognizing the importance of personal choice and love in marriage (Rohrer, 2018).

- **Judaism**

In Judaism, inter-faith marriages are generally discouraged, as the religion places great emphasis on maintaining the continuity of the Jewish faith and culture. However, some liberal Jewish denominations do allow for inter-faith marriages, with certain conditions and requirements (Rohrer, 2018).

- **Christianity**

In Christianity, attitudes towards inter-faith marriages vary depending on the denomination and interpretation of scripture. Some Christian denominations strongly discourage inter-faith marriages, while others are more accepting as long as both partners share a common faith in Jesus Christ (Rohrer, 2018).

- **Yarsanism**

Yarsanism is a syncretic religion that combines elements of various religions, including Islam, Zoroastrianism, and pre-Islamic Iranian religions. The religion does not prohibit inter-faith marriages, but the couples are expected to respect each other's religious beliefs (Rohrer, 2018).

- **Mandaism**

Mandaism is a gnostic religion that originated in the Middle East. The religion prohibits inter-faith marriages, and the community is known to marry within the religion to preserve its traditions and beliefs.

- **Ismaili Islam**

Ismaili Islam is a branch of Shia Islam that believes in the spiritual leadership of the Imams. The religion allows inter-faith marriages with certain conditions, such as the conversion of the non-Muslim partner to Islam (Rohrer, 2018).

- **Hinduism**

Hinduism is a diverse religion that encompasses various beliefs and practices. The religion generally discourages inter-faith marriages, and some Hindu communities even prohibit it. However, there are some liberal Hindus who are open to inter-faith marriages (Rohrer, 2018).

- **Sikhism**

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that originated in the Punjab region of India. The religion generally discourages inter-faith marriages, but the decision is left to the individual and their family (Rohrer, 2018).

It should be noted that while these religions may have their own teachings and guidelines regarding inter-faith marriages, ultimately it is up to the individual and their personal beliefs and values to decide whether or not to pursue such a union.

The Role of Interfaith Marriages in Ensuring Peace, Progress and Prosperity in any Divided Society like Iran

Interfaith marriages can be a powerful tool in promoting peace, progress, and prosperity in any divided society, including Iran. Here are some ways that interfaith marriages can help;

- 1) **Bridging Differences**

Interfaith marriages can help bridge differences between communities, religions, and cultures. When people from different faiths marry, they bring their families and communities together, creating a network of relationships that can help overcome divisions (Rohrer, 2018).

- 2) **Promoting Tolerance and Understanding**

Interfaith marriages can promote tolerance and understanding between different religious groups. When people of different faiths marry, they are forced to confront and negotiate their differences, which can lead to greater understanding and respect (Rohrer, 2018).

3) **Breaking Down Stereotypes**

Interfaith marriages can challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about different religions. When people from different faiths marry, they often have to confront and dispel myths and stereotypes about their partner's religion, which can help break down barriers and promote greater understanding (Rohrer, 2018).

4) **Fostering Empathy and Compassion**

Interfaith marriages can foster empathy and compassion between different religious communities. When people from different faiths marry, they are more likely to be exposed to the joys and challenges of each other's religious traditions, which can lead to greater empathy and compassion (Rohrer, 2018).

5) **Building a More Diverse and Inclusive Society**

Interfaith marriages can help build a more diverse and inclusive society by promoting diversity and celebrating differences. When people from different faiths marry, they bring their unique cultural and religious traditions together, creating a richer and more diverse society (Rohrer, 2018).

Conclusion

Not only Iran but in all the other divided societies, interfaith marriages could be especially beneficial in promoting peace, progress, and prosperity within the context of country's specific complex history of religious and cultural diversity. By promoting greater understanding, empathy, and tolerance between different religious communities, interfaith marriages could help build a more inclusive and harmonious society (HHS, 2022) (Khan, 2023). Therefore, unlike idealizing the Ayatollah Borujerdi's conservative stance on interfaith marriages, Iranian youth has now becoming gradually westernized, and they are going to adopt rationalism in each sphere of life including "to be a spouse of any European partner regardless of considering his or her religion" (Rohrer, 2018).

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