


Research Article

A Critical Analysis of Minority Protection under Ottoman Rule

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Received : September 10, 2025
Accepted : November 11, 2025

Revised : October 28, 2025
Available online : December 29, 2025

How to Cite: Ali Muhammad Bhat. (2025). A Critical Analysis of Minority Protection under Ottoman Rule. *Maklumat: Journal of Da'wah and Islamic Studies*, 3(4), 296–313.
<https://doi.org/10.61166/maklumat.v3i4.91>

A Critical Analysis of Minority Protection under Ottoman Rule

Abstract. In the late years of the 14th century people across the globe and Europe in particular believed in exclusive social structure based on uni-cultural values. At this juncture of history a new Muslim caliphate based on dynastic rule “the Ottoman Empire” emerged on the map of the world. This empire has two broad categories of people consisting of two groups Muslims and non-Muslims. Religion was the decisive factor in describing the statute of people under the Ottoman Empire. There were ethnic groups too under the Ottomans, all these groups were protected without any discrimination based on ethnicity, religion etc. All these groups were given full protection under the Ottoman legal system derived from Shari’ah. All non-Muslims enjoyed reasonable freedom under the course of law. The major significance of this paper is to bridge the gap/gulf which exists in the minds of general reading classes to facilitate peace and harmony between different communities across the globe.

Keywords: Islam, Islamic legalism, Ottoman Legalism, Millet, Minorities

INTRODUCTION

Life according to Islamic principles is sacrosanct and humans in particular are called caliphs (khalifatullah) on Earth. To safeguard human progeny means to save life originated by God with a greater purpose. God has given every right to life with relative pacifism to fulfil divine objectives. Rights that are necessary for any human being and are fundamental to safeguarding life and property are known as human rights. Such rights are essential for human development in a more sophisticated and free environment. In every society, people belong to different races, religions, and ethnic backgrounds along with linguistics and castes. They are protected under state law and their life and property are declared sanctified. From the emergence of the Madinian state down to the Ottoman Empire all religious minorities were protected under divine principles of law. They were given due respect and religious freedom in worship under their religion and provided all necessary provisions for a peaceful existence.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, an attempt was made to discuss the rights and freedom of minorities. In this regard, this paper is divided into two parts to discuss and analysis the legalism of Islam concerning minority protection as Dhimmis while under Ottoman legalism about minorities through the millet system and later modifications in the Ottoman state structure.

OBJECTIVE

Islamic law puts impetus upon protecting life by declaring that all humans are equal. Their life and status are safeguarded under the freedom of worldly affairs that everyone should be free and have liberty in this world to decide their future. God outwardly said;

“And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book [i.e., the Qur’ān] in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you, We prescribed a law and a method.¹ Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good.² To Allah is your return, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ.”³

¹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2004), *The Noble Quran Translation of Surah al-Maida*; 5:48

² It directly mentions the unconditional faith and sincerity., i.e. i.e., obedience to Allah according to what He enjoined in the Qur’ān and through the Sunnah of His Prophet

³ Surah Al-Ma'idah: 48

And say, "The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills let him believe; and whoever wills let him disbelieve".⁴

"God does not forbid you from doing good and being just to those who have neither fought you over your faith nor evicted you from your homes..."⁵

Islam has laid down conditions for the religious status of non-Muslims, particularly Dhimmi. Islam adopts both absolute and relative concepts of peace as per the situation. Islam reconciles with all sections of humanity on peace lines. It endorses positive acceptance of things and allows welfare activities on a reconciliation basis.

Under Islamic law, dhimmis are granted personal and property security, the freedom to practice their religion, and a certain level of internal community autonomy, allowing them to manage their private affairs according to their religious laws and customs. Dhimmi retain these rights as long as they adhere to the terms of their agreement with the Muslim state. A key element of these agreements was the payment of Jizyah, a poll tax that served as both tribute and a symbol of their faith and obedience to Muslim authority.⁶

Muslim scholars have unanimously concluded that these rulings apply to all followers of all faiths; indeed, they extend to the entirety of humanity.⁷ According to Quranic commands, all humans are bound to achieve justice and rely on all aspects of it. Quran commands its followers in general and Islamic authorities, in particular, to judge humans based on justice.

That is why the Prophet (peace and blessings upon him) was told; "...If you judge, judge between them with justice."⁸

"We have revealed to you the scripture with the truth that you may judge between people by what the Lord has taught you."⁹

During Prophet Muhammad's time, people were inspired by his approach to reconciliation and peaceful co-existence. When he migrated to Medina he signed a document of truce between all sections of society for a peaceful and undiscriminating lifestyle. At present people across the globe are inspired by a document, the Medinian Charter that was issued by the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) after migration to Medina in 622 CE. The purpose of this document is to normalize and standardize the rapport between the Muslims and non-Muslims of Medina.¹⁰ Historically it is clear that the document is first of its nature on minority rights and has been issued before the use of the term minority when it emerged in 16th century Europe. The essence of this

⁴ Surah Al-Kahf 18:29

⁵ Surah 60:8

⁶ Abu Yusuf (1382 Hijri), Kitab al-Kharaj (Cairo: al-Matba'h al-Salafiyya) translated by A. Ben Shemesh (1969), Taxation in Islam, vol. III (Leiden: E. J. Brill); Ibn Qayyim al-Jaw'iyah (1961), Ahkam Ahl Al-Dhimmah (Damascus: Matba'h Jami'ah Dimashq), M. Khadduri (1955), War and Peace in the Law of Islam (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press). H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Ks (1953), Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam (Leiden: E. J. Brill) "Ahl al-Kitab," 16-17, "Dhimma," 75-76, "Dhizya," 91-92,

⁷ Kamali, Mohammad, 'Freedom, Equality, And Justice In Islam,' Islamic Texts Society, 11

⁸ al-Nisa, 4:105

⁹ al-Shura, 42: 15

¹⁰ Baskin Oran, (2021), Minorities and minority rights in Turkey : from the Ottoman Empire to the present state, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, , Colorado, 11

document is being the first written contract of the world where without discrimination people of all faiths were given the right to protect their country (National Integrity) unanimously with Muslims. In this document, the first minority status was given to Muslim migrants known as *Muhajir* while all Medinian people were considered as *Ansar* constituted the Muslim community (Ummah). In this document principle argument was that of the right to equality and voluntary participation, of three groups: Muslims, Jews, and Arab polytheists was paid much attention to and discussed at length.¹¹

While observing the reality, authenticity and axiological significance of the document it provided more protection to minorities than what most of the autocratic rulers are providing opportunities to their Muslim citizens.

“Implicit in his argument is that representative governments where Muslims can participate, even as minorities, are far more Islamic and protected than autocratic governments ruled by a Muslim majority”.¹²

The Quranic directives for Muslims are to discuss the mutual points which common points between Muslims and non-Muslims. Such directives prepare the Muslim mind for peace and command them not to fight with the people of the Book.

“And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam).”¹³ (Al-Quran; 29:46)

Under the justified rule of Islam, all societies were provided full security, particularly to minorities. These minorities were not forced to partake in the defence service sector. It was considered that the Islamic government is fully responsible for the protection of honour, life and property of all sections of society along with minorities. Religious minorities were exempted from military service on the payment of *Jizyah*.¹⁴ Therefore the Quran declares that.

“There is no coercion in religion. Verily, guidance has manifestly been distinguished from error”¹⁵.

The Quran was sent to bring peace and harmony to humanity, through guidance. The mission of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) is a worldwide mission to establish worldwide peace. Humanity was not divided into compartments but was guided for peaceful existence and Khalifas (Caliphs) were directed for the same to work out for justice and equality. Though there were wars between Muslims to implement justice and equality, the Khalifah (Caliphate) of Rashidun Caliphs during

¹¹ Ibid, p.12

¹² Julia Voelker McQuaid (2007), *The Struggle for Unity and Authority in Islam: Reviving the Caliphate?* (A joint CNA/Wilton Park Conference), The CNA Corporation

¹³ Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2004), *The Meaning of The Holy Quran*, Amana Pubns, Surah Ankubut; 29:46

¹⁴ Abu Yusuf 91382 A.H.), *Kitab Al-Kharaj*, Cairo, 122f and 144. Srakhsi (1355 A.H.), *Sharah al-Siyar al-Kabir*, Dar al-Ma'arif Hyderabad Deccan, A.H; Fazlur Rahman, “Non-Muslim Minorities in an Islamic State,” *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 7 (13-24), 20.

¹⁵Al-Quran :2:256

their rule ensured the security of the lives and property of non-Muslims. The non-Muslim scholars who laid false allegations against Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) for treating non-Muslims indifferently, assured the security of life and property to priests of Najran and the bishop of Banu Al-Harith Ibn Ka'b along with other Bishops and their followers. They were guaranteed, that they would receive all basic requirements for their Churches, and possession and cloisters would remain under their control. According to Shari'ah, Allah and His messenger would guarantee that no bishop would be removed from his see, nor any monk from his monastery, nor any priest from his office and none of their rights or powers would be changed as long as they were sincere and good, and no cruelty would be shown to them¹⁶. As humans, Muslims have no superiority or privilege over non-Muslims be they Christians, Jews or Hindus. History is the witness and full of such examples when 4th Caliph Ali (R.A) loudly declared that a Non-Muslim cannot be punished when both families agree to pay and receive the blood money to the Muslim victim's family. Caliph Ali (R.A) said, "The blood of those of our non-Muslim subjects is equal to our blood and his blood money is like our blood money"¹⁷.

Life and property of non-Muslims is declared sacred and during natural calamities or disasters, non-Muslims were exempted from paying tax even in old age or due to disability. These people and their families should be helped by paying the maintenance allowance from the official treasury¹⁸.

The significance of respecting and honouring the rights of minorities in Islam is highlighted by this profound saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAAS): "If a person kills a non-Muslim, he will not even smell the fragrance of paradise, which spreads over a distance of forty years"¹⁹.

Hadrath Abu Bakr established several key terms in his agreement with the people of Aanat, including their churches and monasteries would remain intact, and they were permitted to ring their bells except during Muslim prayer times. They could display the cross during their religious festivals. They were required to safeguard the lives and property of Muslims when necessary²⁰.

During the reign of Umar Farooq (R.A.), the rights of minorities were upheld by the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Numerous agreements with minorities were established, the most significant being the treaty with the people of the town of Azan. When No'man Bin Muqran (R.A.) signed this treaty on behalf of Umar Farooq (R.A.). In this agreement it was resolved that they would not be forced to abandon their religion, nor would their laws be changed. They were required to pay a nominal fee annually to a designated official....²¹

Umar Farooq (R.A.) was mindful of the rights of minorities until his final moments. In his last will, he urged his successor to honour the commitments made

¹⁶ Al-Mughirah.

¹⁷ Abu Yusuf, Op. Cit, 187

¹⁸ Ibn Rushd, Badiyat-ul-Mujtahid, vol. 2, 310

¹⁹ Bukhari, Muhammad bin Ismaeel, Al-Jami'al-Sahih, Kitab ul Jizya, Bab Ism Man Qatala, 2995.

²⁰ Dr. Hameed-ul-Allah (2005), Siasi Wathiqat, (Majlas taraqi adab, Lahore) 242

²¹ Ibid, 265

to minorities, ensuring they were protected and not subjected to undue burdens²². During Abu Bakr's caliphate, a law was established to protect minorities, which Hadrat Umar continued to enforce. This law confirmed equal civil rights for both minorities and Muslims. In cases where a Muslim killed a dhimmi, the murderer was sentenced to death. Aside from the jizya tax, no additional levies were imposed on dhimmis. Moreover, disabled and financially disadvantaged individuals from minority groups received financial support from the bait al-Mal, similar to the support provided to Muslims.²³

During the reign of Usman (R.A.), the rights of minorities were protected following the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. No discrimination on behalf of minorities was accepted and people who killed any minority member or played a part in safeguarding the killer of any minority were punished with death even being Muslim. Such a plot was observed in Kufa. This incident demonstrates the equal value placed on the lives of Muslims and non-Muslim minorities in the Islamic state. Additionally, when the ambassador of Usman (R.A.) Saad bin Abi Sarrah²⁴ made a treaty with the chiefs of Noba and the inhabitants from Aswan, the people of Noba were guaranteed protection under the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. The Muslim army would neither fight nor attack them²⁵. Usman (R.A.) also instructed the tax-collecting officer to collect levies justly.²⁶

Hadrat Ali openly championed the rights of minorities, asserting that the blood of a non-Muslim within the Islamic state holds the same value as that of a Muslim.²⁷

Ibn Qayim Jauzi pens down a detailed account of Prophet Muhammad's positive behaviour with non-Muslims in his masterpiece "Ahkam Ahl Dhimma". He provides detailed information about receiving Non-Muslims in his mosque. Reported by Ahmad bin Hanble and Abu Daud, from Usman bin Abi al-Äs that;

"The delegation of Thaqif went to see Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and he received them in the mosque"²⁸

Like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's work "Ahkam Ahl al-Dhimma" other works of Muslim scholars have a significant text that deals with the rules and regulations concerning non-Muslim minorities (dhimmis) living under Islamic rule. It provides numerous examples and detailed discussions on the rights and responsibilities of dhimmis, reflecting the legal and social dynamics of the time. This historical instance illustrates the pragmatic relationships that often developed between Muslim rulers and their non-Muslim subjects. These Christians prayed for the success of their Muslim overlords, recognizing that their continued well-being and property protection depended on the stability and strength of the new Muslim rulers. This

²² Abu Yousuf, Op.cit. 340

²³ Ibid, 341

²⁴ Baihaqi, Ahmad bin Husain (n.d.), Al-Sunan-al-Kubra, bab ul Qisas, 8, 136

²⁵ Dr. Hamidullah, Op. cit. p.306

²⁶ Dr. Khurshed Ahmad Fariq (1978), Usman (R.A.) k Sarkari Khutut, (Idara Islamiyat, Lahore),114

²⁷ . Baihaqi, Ahmad bin Husain (n.d.), Al-Sunan-al-Kubra, Bab ul Diyyat, 8, 34

²⁸ Ahmad bin Hanble, Musand, 4:218, 17942; Abu Daud, (n.d.) Sunan Abu Daud, Kitab al-Kharaj wa al amara wal fay. Ibn Qaym Jauz, Ahkam Ahl al-Dhimma, Bab ul al Hadi Ushr

sentiment highlights how the dhimmi system, guaranteed certain rights and protections for non-Muslims²⁹.

During the height of the Ottoman Empire, non-Muslims in the newly conquered territories were offered a choice under Islamic sacred law: they could either convert to Islam or retain their faith and live as subjects under the Muslim ruler. To protect people under the caliphate they have to pay Jizya as protection tax. In this way, they were exempted from military service. The Ottoman Empire was home to numerous Christian and Jewish communities. The Sultans' policies towards each community were shaped by the specific conditions under which they were incorporated into the Empire. Typically, the Ottoman authorities treated the dhimmis (non-Muslims) of all denominations as members of distinct communities, or millets, rather than as individuals. An individual's status as a dhimmi was entirely dependent on their affiliation with a particular millet.³⁰ Since sacred Islamic law did not govern the relationships between dhimmis, their internal affairs and organization were managed according to their religious laws.³¹

In Ottoman literature, terminology like 'minority' which has modern roots is not found, instead they adopted the Millet system. Ottomans established the Millet system and assigned Muslims a position similar to what we would today refer to as minority status. The millet system took its roots from justice which meant giving rights to whomever qualifies them. This mentality of justice was the first appearance of legal pluralism in the Ottoman Empire. The people of the Ottoman had a plural structure and consisted of different nations, religions and ideas. Griffiths defines it as "a legal system is pluralistic when the ruler (either monarch or sultan) commands permits different bodies of law for different groups".³² In this diverse context, the Ottoman justice system was shaped by its pluralistic nature. Within this inclusive and varied court system, certain religious groups were permitted to establish their courts, allowing them to apply their religious laws to their communities. Undoubtedly, the Ottoman system, adopted the Millet System having roots deep in the mission of Prophet Ibrahim (AS). Under the Millet system, the Ottoman Community was divided into Muslims and Non-Muslims with equal rights. Such segregation didn't halt Ottomans from being equal before law and discrimination never became the philosophy of Ottoman rule.

The fundamental purpose of the Quran is humanity in unity and all diverse tribes must be united under the worldview of "millet Ibrahim", meaning the religion

²⁹Thomas Walker Arnold (1913), *Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (London: Constable and Robinson Ltd., 61; J.J. Saunders (2002), *A History of Medieval Islam*, (London: Routledge,), p.53

³⁰H. Gibb and H. Bowen (1960), *Islamic Society and the West*, (London: University of London Press) (1/5) 207-12.

³¹A. S. Tritton, (2021), *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects*, 5-12; Paul Wittek (1938), *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*, (London), 28 f.; H. Gibb and H. Bowen, (1960), *Op.cit.*, I, 207-61; Harry Luke (1936), *The Making of Modern Turkey*, (London), ch iv; Benjamin Braude, 'Foundation myths of the Millet system' in Braude and Lewis, *Christians and Jews*, 70f

³²Griffiths, John (1986) "what is Legal Pluralism", *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, No: 24, p.5.

of Abraham which serves as root for both Judaism and Christianity³³. The term was never used to describe a race or a society united by language; rather, it was an administrative and cultural term for people of a particular belief or sect.³⁴ The millet system recognized non-Muslim communities primarily based on their religion, rather than ethnicity, living within the Ottoman Empire under the guidance of their religious leaders. Members of these millets were free to practice their religion and follow their traditions in areas such as education, marriage, and domestic life, all while maintaining absolute loyalty to the state.³⁵

Under Ottoman rule, Muslims recognized the prophets of Christianity and Judaism. Consequently, both the "ahl al-kitab" and non-"ahl al-kitab" communities were collectively referred to as "teb'a" meaning "subjects of the Ottoman Empire."³⁶

Muslims held a dominant position within the Empire, while the "others" were assigned a "minority status,"³⁷ a condition that was relatively acceptable to these minorities before modern times. According to Lewis, "If we define toleration as the absence of persecution rather than the absence of discrimination, then the Ottoman record up until the late nineteenth century is exemplary."³⁸ He further says;

"For many Europeans, the fall of Constantinople represents a significant historical catastrophe and an irreparable defeat for Christendom. Despite the current friendly relations between Turkey and the West, a deep-seated mistrust and occasional hostility persist, rooted in the European Christian past. For most educated Western Europeans, the terms "Turk" and "Turkey" carry complex emotional associations, shaped by centuries of conflict. In Eastern Europe, the traditional image of the Turkish oppressor has become ingrained in national folklore."³⁹

These combined trends of military and technological innovation, along with cultural cosmopolitanism, sparked a series of reforms in education, the military, and finance starting in the 1830s, the empire's diversity by granting civil rights to minorities, ensuring that Armenian and Syrian Christians, Jews, and other millets. Communities of different religious and ethnic backgrounds known as minorities in the modern context could freely practice their religions. Ottoman rulers faced some opposition from conservatives arguing that secular education and other reforms were detrimental to Ottoman society. The Islamic concept of a nation, which is defined by religious rather than ethnic or political characteristics, and the centuries-long

³³ The Al-Quran (2004), English Translation by Saheeh International, (Jeddah: Al-Muntada Al-Islami), Surah; 2:120,130,135, Surah 3:95

³⁴ Eryilmaz, Bilal (1992) *Osmanlı Devletinde Millet Sistemi*, 1. Edition, Istanbul, Ağaç, p.11.

³⁵ Tas, Latif (2014) "The Myth of the Ottoman Millet System: Its Treatment of Kurds and a Discussion of Territorial and Non-Territorial Autonomy", *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 21, p.496.

³⁶ Faroqhi, Suraiya (2007) *Subjects of the Sultan*, 1. Edition, (London, I.B. Tauris), 12; Eryilmaz, Bilal (1992), *Op.cit.* 14.

³⁷ Wahakn N. Dadrian (2002), "The Armenian Question and the Wartime Fate of the Armenians as Documented by the Officials of the Ottoman Empire's World War I Allies: Germany and Austria-Hungary," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34, 61.

³⁸ Bernard Lewis (2004), *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East*, Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, 119

³⁹ Idiom, 115

Ottoman millet system, which granted significant autonomy to recognized minorities like Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, only acknowledged non-Muslim minorities. This understanding of minorities remains deeply embedded in the Turkish nation's mindset, where over 90 per cent of the population is Muslim.⁴⁰ Consequently, in common parlance, the term "minority" typically refers exclusively to non-Muslims. In the Ottoman Empire, minorities were required to pay certain taxes, such as the Jizya, in exchange for exemption from military and civil service positions. Those who voluntarily offered themselves for military and civil services were exempted from the protection tax. The Ottoman Turks did employ some non-Muslims in both civil and military services. According to various sources, around 10% to 20% of the sipahis (cavalry) from the Balkans were non-Muslims, and these soldiers were granted land, known as *timar*⁴¹. Moreover, most Ottoman translators were selected from among the non-Muslims, and administrators of Moldova and Walachia were often chosen from the Phanariot Greeks. Regarding taxes, non-Muslim minorities paid roughly the same amount as Muslims.⁴² According to Yapp, "It is...suggested that all non-Muslims paid a special tax, the *jizya*, but there were considerable concessions between non-Muslim groups, depending upon age, status and services to the state and it has been calculated that no more than one-third of non-Muslims paid the tax."⁴³

In the Ottoman Empire, minority status was determined by religion and exclusively applied to non-Muslims. Following the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the millet system was implemented in 1454. This system granted Christians and Jews autonomy in managing their internal matters, such as marriage and divorce, inheritance, internal taxation, and religious rituals.⁴⁴ The Muslim majority continued to act as custodians for the non-Muslim minority. The Ottomans somewhat relaxed this arrangement by granting a form of non-territorial autonomy to non-Muslims, while still preserving Muslim oversight. In 1454, they formalized this system by establishing the Millet system.

Upon the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottomans gained control over a substantial non-Muslim population. Governing such a diverse populace solely through a Sharia-based legal system became impractical. The Millet system, as we know it today, initiated the development of an order characterized by autonomy and decentralization for non-Muslim groups, yet within a religious hierarchy. This system comprised two asymmetric components: (1) the ruling and judging class (*Millet-i Hakime*), primarily Muslims, with Turks as the "first among equals"; and (2) the ruled and judged class (*Millet-i Mahkume*), consisting of non-Muslims recognized as the

⁴⁰ Aktoprak, Elçin (2023), 'Non-Muslims in Turkey as the 'Founding Other', A Companion to Modern Turkey's Centennial: Political, Sociological, Economic and Institutional Transformations since 1923, ed. Alpaslan Özerdem, Ahmet erdi Öztürk, Edinburgh University Press, 215-228.

⁴¹ Kafadar, Cemal (1994), "The Ottomans and Europe," *Handbook of European History 1400-1600*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, Vol.1, 601.

⁴² H. von Moltke (1969), *Türkiye Mektupları*, Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 244 quoted by Veysel Şimşek (2015), in his PhD thesis: *The Grand Strategy of the Ottoman Empire, 1826-1841*, McMaster University.

⁴³ M. E. Yapp (1987), *The Making of the Modern Near East, 1792-1923*, New York: Longman, 6

⁴⁴ Prof. Dr. Hakan Yılmaz and Çağdan Erdoğan (2016), *Turkey: Minorities, Othering and Discrimination, Citizenship Claims*, 5-11

People of the Book (*ehl-i kitap*), with Greeks (Rums) as the "first among equals" in this group.⁴⁵

The Ottoman Empire demonstrated that within a multiracial state, where minorities were granted significant autonomy and privileges, the development of national consciousness and national identity was not possible. To preserve the fundamental rights of minorities, a protection tax was laid upon them to preserve. In 1489, the Empire collected approximately 31 million akçe from Jizya, accounting for about eight per cent of its total income.⁴⁶ However, minorities, exempt from military and governmental service, concentrated on economic and commercial activities. To avoid paying Jizya, many minorities illegally exploited capitulations, such as using foreign passports.⁴⁷

Economically, minorities surpassed others. Each community could establish its welfare institutions funded by internal taxes. Communities were allowed to levy their internal taxes to support these institutions. State taxes were collectively assessed by local Ottoman authorities based on the community's size and wealth, but the actual tax collection was managed by community-appointed tax collectors. The tax amount was usually negotiated between community leaders and local authorities. If a community felt wrong, it could appeal to state courts or central authorities.⁴⁸

Minorities under the Ottoman govt. faced no discrimination. They enjoyed substantiated status in the Ottoman courts and have been raised to the status of personal doctors, for rulers and representatives of municipal committees. They were allowed to settle in different parts of the Ottoman Empire to overcome European hardships. Shari'ah was not implemented to solve their religious and Intra-communal disputes but were allowed to solve their disputes according to their religion and tradition. Their administrative or inter-communal disputes were solved under more modern liberal laws sophisticated than modern secular laws. To build their social status and fair participation in administration, clauses were included in the royal decree known as *Hatt-i Sharief of Gulhani*. This decree allowed minorities to become part of administrative activities without considering any discriminatory approach based on ethnicity and religion. The Ottoman Sultan regularly made necessary arrangements to meet leaders of minorities and discussed all sorts of issues of necessary concern. After 1856 A.D. minorities' positions were raised in offices and were appointed as courtiers and other prominent positions in government offices. A good number of Jews were appointed as representatives of municipal councils at the district level.⁴⁹ Furthermore, a group of Greek army doctors and Armenian engineers

⁴⁵ Baskın Oran, (2021), *Minorities and Minority Rights in Turkey: From the Ottoman Empire to the Present State*, (Eng. Trans. *John William Day*), Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., London, 10-12

⁴⁶ Halil İnalcık (1994), "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600," *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, Ed. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, Cambridge: University Press, 66.

⁴⁷ Ahmet Refik (1989), *Türk İdaresinde Bulgaristan*, İstanbul: Enderun Kitapevi, 78-79 quoted by Memet Yetişgin, *The Ottoman Way of Governing Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Communities*, p.148

⁴⁸ http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/publications/faculty_research/sec_4.pdf, retrieved on 25/6/2024

⁴⁹H. J. Cohen (1973), *The Jews of the Middle East 1860-1972*, Jerusalem: Israel university Press, 10

remained intact and were not discriminated against based on minority status.⁵⁰ They enjoyed these rights while maintaining absolute loyalty to the state.⁵¹

Some Balkan Christians who converted to Islam belonged to persecuted religious minorities, such as the Bogomil's of Bosnia, who saw the Ottoman conquest as liberation from oppression. However, there was no significant push for mass conversion, to force anyone to conversion.⁵²

The concept of minority status under Islamic law transcended distinctions of caste, colour, and creed, emphasizing the equality of all humans while recognizing purity, and piety based on faith. Historically, the millet system exemplifies this approach. The social and economic strengths of various minority groups influenced their interactions with the Ottoman state, a relationship shaped by the state's patrimonial nature. The impact of these factors on the communities' relations with the government until the millet system's dissolution in 1856. Ottoman Empire proved that no national consciousness and no national identity could develop within a multiracial state, which to a large extent gave autonomy and privileges to minorities.⁵³

Minorities under the Ottomans were not only protected people but they were given high positions due to their services for the state. While recognizing their contribution in different fields of life. They were appointed as government offices and attained better positions in comparison to Christians under Ottomans.⁵⁴ When Jews were persecuted and expelled from Spain in 1492-1502, the Ottomans appointed them as government advisors as well as employees in different fields such as government advisors, etc.⁵⁵. These Jews worked as court physicians and bankers. The Ottomans recognized their skills and techniques in the field of finances and industries.⁵⁶

Under the Ottomans, religious legalism concerning minorities was evident in religious courts, which were legally empowered to handle minority cases, providing a significant opportunity for fair judgment. However, this pluralistic framework was often viewed as a weakness because it was recognized only by the state administration, resulting in weak legal pluralism. This approach, known as simple legal pluralism, allowed non-Muslims the option to choose between their religious courts or Islamic courts for their cases.⁵⁷ Despite this freedom, most non-Muslims

⁵⁰Carter V. Findley (Oct., 1972), *The Foundation of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry: The Beginnings of Bureaucratic Reform Under Salim-III And Mahmud-II International Journal of Middle East Studies*, (3/4), 388-416; Also "The Administrative Legacy and Modern Middle East" .32

⁵¹Tas, Latif, (2014) *Op. cit.* (Vol.21), p.496.

⁵²Stanford Shaw (1976), *History of The Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Cambridge University Press, (vol.1),19

⁵³ Syahrul Hidayat (2014), *Minority groups in Ottoman Turkey before 1856: different arrangements of the Jews and the Christians under Millet system*, *IJIMS, Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, (4/1), June 25-50

⁵⁴ Lucien Gubbay (2000), *Sunlight and Shadow: The Jewish Experience of Islam*, New York: Other Press, 105

⁵⁵ H. J. Cohen (1973), *The Jews of the Middle East 1860-1972*, New York, Wiley, .9

⁵⁶ Lucien Gubbay, *Op. cit.*, p.107

⁵⁷ iths, John (1986) "What is Legal Pluralism", *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, (No:24), 5

preferred Islamic courts, to solve their disputes.⁵⁸ This is a landmark achievement in the legal system where justice was not halted on religious grounds. According to Schick, Sharia law was the primary and officially recognized law in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁹ Non-Muslims could opt for sharia courts because of the commandments prevailing in the Quran. The Quran mandates fairness in judgment: *"(They are fond of) listening to falsehood, of devouring anything forbidden. If they do come to thee, either judge between them, or decline to interfere. If thou decline, they cannot hurt thee in the least. If thou judge, judge in equity between them. For Allah loveth those who judge in equity."*⁶⁰ Islamic courts could enforce both the religious laws of minorities and Islamic law. Under this system, judges in religious courts functioned similarly to arbitrators.⁶¹

The most significant freedoms for both Muslims and non-Muslims were those of religion, worship, and conscience. The Quran emphasizes that Prophet Muhammad's role was solely to provide a reminder: "Therefore do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish."⁶² "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, which never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things."⁶³ According to the Muslim scholar Maududi, non-Muslims enjoy the same freedoms of conscience, opinion, expression, and association as Muslims, within the legal limitations applicable to both. In their towns and cities, non-Muslims are allowed to practice their religion freely. However, the Islamic State retains the authority to impose necessary restrictions on its practices as it sees fit.⁶⁴

Minorities have hold on many European languages and their skills were used by the Ottomans by employing them as interpreters. But these Jews and Christians played dubious characters in bringing the Empire down. This happened due to irregularities in financial activities by the Jews and Christians due to collaboration with European powers.⁶⁵ These minorities lost their positions in government due to

⁵⁸ Ercan, Yavuz (2001) *Osmanlı Yönetiminde Gayrimüslimler*, 1. Edition, Ankara, Turhan, 247 quoted by Arş. Gör. Akif Tögel (2016), *Ottoman Human Rights Practice: A Model Of Legal Pluralism*, YBHD (vol.2), 201-220

⁵⁹ Schick, Irvin Cemil (1987) "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Yahudiler", *Tarih ve Toplum*, Vol. 43 cited in Kenanoğlu, p.55, quoted by Arş. Gör. Akif Tögel (2016) *Ottoman Human Rights Practice: A Model Of Legal Pluralism*, YBHD (vol.2), 201-220

⁶⁰ Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2004), *Op.cit.*, Translation of Surah 5:42

⁶¹ Kenanoğlu, Kenanoğlu, M.Macit (2012) *Osmanlı Millet Sistemi: Mit ve Gerçek*, 3rd Edition, Istanbul, Klasik, 397, quoted by Arş. Gör. Akif Tögel (2016), *Ottoman Human Rights Practice: A Model Of Legal Pluralism*, YBHD (vol.2), 201-220

⁶² Abdullah Yusuf Ali (2004), *Op.cit.*, translation of Surah 88:21

⁶³ *Ibid*, Quran; 2/256.

⁶⁴ Mawdudi, S. Abul 'Ala' (1941) *Islamic Law and Constitution*, Lahore, Markazi Maktaba Islami New Delhi, 1974, 274-76; Saeed, Abdullah (1999) "Rethinking Citizenship Rights of Non-Muslims in an Islamic State: Rashid al-Ghannushi's contribution to the evolving debate", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, (vol.10), 316.

⁶⁵ Kemal H. Karpat (1985), *Ottoman Population 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics Turkish and Ottoman studies*, University of Wisconsin Press, 94

their uncertain character as interpreters and minorities themselves lost economic status.⁶⁶

The non-Muslim populations living under Ottoman rule in the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Middle East joined hands with groups who formed the Hınchaks in Geneva in 1887 and the Dashnaks in Tbilisi in 1890. Such minority involvement with terror groups gave rise to "a *Turko-Armenian conflict*." Their actions resulted in "sporadic acts of terrorism, retaliatory punitive raids, and individual deadly assaults," exacerbating tensions.⁶⁷ These minorities, now under foreign influence demanded created between the ruler and ruled minorities. Concurrently, Armenians escalated their demands, openly challenging the Ottoman government (Babiali) for an independent Armenia within the six provinces of Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Harput, Diyarbakır, and Sivas. The parties like Union and Progress mostly under foreign influence felt pray for them which resulted in weakness and corruption.⁶⁸ As the Ottoman Empire entered the Great War, its capacity for revitalization diminished.⁶⁹ "The war and its aftermath unleashed a wave of imperialist expansion among the victorious powers."⁷⁰

The European powers viewed themselves as guardians of the Christian minorities within the Ottoman Empire, leading to increased intervention in the empire's internal matters. In the Ottoman Empire, these Christian minorities were perceived as colonies of their protecting states and thus were seen as traitors, blamed for the empire's decline⁷¹. This perception was reinforced for Turkey by the humiliating Sèvres Peace Treaty, which explains the Turkish mistrust of the Allies' expansive definition of minorities and its subsequent rejection of the Treaty of Lausanne.

The Ottoman Empire's millet system, for instance, granted a certain level of cultural and religious self-governance to non-Muslim communities, including Orthodox Christians, Armenians, Jews, and others. In recent years, the Special Rapporteur of UNO has also been tasked by the Council to deliver detailed reports on several issues, such as "manifestations of religious defamation, particularly focusing on the severe consequences of Islamophobia for the rights of its adherents" (2009, 2008); "political platforms advocating or inciting racial discrimination" (2007); and "the conditions of Muslim and Arab populations in different regions of the world".

⁶⁶ Avigdor Levy (1994), (ed.), *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton, N. J.: Darwin Press; Washington, D. C. Institute of Turkish Studies, 9596

⁶⁷ Wahakn N. Dadrian (2002), "The Armenian Question and the Wartime Fate of the Armenians as Documented by the Officials of the Ottoman Empire's World War I Allies: Germany and Austria-Hungary," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, (34), 62.

⁶⁸ General Von der Goltz (1970) , *1912-1913 Balkan Harbi Barışından Sonra Osmanlı Yönetimi Üzerinde Düşünceler*, İstanbul: Harb Akademileri Basımevi, 9-11, quoted by Memet Yetişgin, *The Ottoman Way of Governing Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Communities*, 135-168

⁶⁹ Karpat, Kemal H. (1996) *Türk Demokrasi Tarihi: Sosyal, Ekonomik, Kültürel Temeller*, İstanbul: AFA Yayıncılık, 48. Memet Yetişgin, *The Ottoman Way of Governing Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Communities*.

⁷⁰ Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*, 327.

⁷¹ Kurban, Dilek, (2003), *Confronting Equality: The Need for Constitutional Protection of Minorities on Turkey's Path to the European Union*, in: *Columbia Law Review*, (35/1), 151-214

The 2007 report highlighted a rise in grievances related to religious discrimination, particularly targeting Muslims in Europe, the United States, Myanmar, China and India. Similarly, global reports on forced labour and child labour have investigated the impact of these practices on minority communities.⁷²

RESULT

The outcome of this paper is to anti-Muslim approach adopted by European powers particularly from 18th century till date they have not left any stoned unturned to defame Ottoman Empire which served as the one of the longest dynasty to rule over a period of more than 600 years. Such an approach gave rise to communal hatred and developed a secularist class with full anti-Arab sentiments. Such a class of modern young Turks considered Arabs and their religion responsible for their anti-Ottoman campaign.

CONCLUSION

The protection of minorities was integral to the Islamic legal framework embraced by the Ottoman Empire, fostering a pluralistic culture and the development of a multinational and multicultural society within a single empire. Drawing from the core principles of Islamic law, the Ottomans implemented the millet system, which balanced the rights and responsibilities of both rulers and subjects, particularly non-Muslims. This system did not promote discrimination or create inequality between Muslims and non-Muslims. Instead, the Ottoman legal system upheld strict fairness, ensuring that minorities were judged according to their laws, a practice akin to what modern nation-states now consider the personal rights of citizens. Non-Muslims enjoy the same freedoms of conscience, opinion, expression, and association as Muslims, with any legal restrictions applying equally to both Muslims and Non-Muslims. The Ottoman Empire serves as a valuable model for contemporary multinational states, especially given the challenges minorities face today, such as threats to their existence and the loss of property Muslims in Non-Muslim states and vice versa. They also had the opportunity to hold public office and received equal pay alongside Muslims. However, the system remained under Ottoman control until the rise of nationalism.

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⁷² Promoting and Protecting Minority Rights (2013): A Guide for Advocates, United Nations Declaration for Human Rights, Geneva, 40-107,

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