

Integration of Multicultural Society: Islamic Perspective

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Abstract. Integration of society becomes an important agenda in conveying the message of unity and peace for humankind. For Muslims, this message has been practiced since the time of Prophet Muhammad. This study illustrates how the Prophet had emphasized the importance of integration with Muslims and non-Muslims society in various aspects of their life. This will focuses on the concept of integration of society by exploring the methodology of the Prophet in managing plural society without neglecting the foreign perspective on the subject.

Keywords: Integration, Society, Madinah, Multicultural Society, Co-Existence

1. Introduction

Every society has its own way to live in peace and harmony, especially the plural society with diverse ethnicities, religions, and cultures. In fact, diversity can be a source of strength and success of a society, although at first it may seem difficult to unite all the different communities in a society. For Muslims, Prophet Muhammad showed the example of a peaceful plural society during his lifetime. Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Magian and Sabian were the communities that bonded together under one constitution which generally produces various understandings in many different contexts.

2. The Integration Of Society And Its Importance In Islam

Integration can be defined as “the extent to which an individual experiences a sense of belonging to a social group or collectively by virtue of sharing its norms, values, beliefs, etc (Jary&Jary, 1991). It is also understood by the extent to which the activity or function of different institutions or sub-systems within a society complement rather than contradict each other. For example, the family is integrated within the economic systems of advanced industrial societies to the extent that it sustains and reproduces labour power (but not another commodity), while acting as a unit of consumption (rather than production), which promote the complementary and coordinated activity of other subsystems of society (Jary&Jary, 1991).

Integration is also widely used in various areas. It is not only used in the intermingling of people or groups in a society, but it includes the action or process of integrating economic, politics, (Pearsall, 1998) and education. Besides, unlike integration, segregation describes a situation in which “members of different racial groups rarely come into contact with one another or interact as social equals. Under segregation, separation along racial lines applies to nearly all aspects of life and those contacts between racial groups that do occur are socially controlled” (Junior, 2008). There will be no systematic or institutional discrimination against members of any racial groups in a racially integrated society (Junior, 2008). This type of integration aims at mutual recognition of group differences, which distinguishes it from assimilation in which minority groups lose their separate identities in the dominant group culture. Its ultimate goal is the elimination of barriers and impediments which are based on ethnicity, gender, and disability.

In the late 19th century, Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, was credited for introducing the theory of social integration. In sociology, social integration usually goes hand in hand with social solidarity which

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generally contributes to the integration of society. It attracts men strongly to one another, ensures frequent contacts between them, connects and validates each other within a community (Durkheim, 1984)

The concept of integration of society is widely used especially in a plural society which contains diverse and different cultures and backgrounds. In Islam, this concept was introduced earlier although it did not use the equivalent term. Allah SWT mentioned in the Holy Book (al-Qur'an 49:13). From this verse, it is clearly understood that the existence of different pairs, nations and tribes is not a problem, but it is a sign to make them know, connect and integrate with each other. A Western scholar also acknowledges the existence of the integration of society in Islam. *"One of the distinctive marks of Islam, compared with other great religions, is the variety of people and races who have embraced it, and among whom there has grown a strong feeling of brotherhood and a measure of harmony. Perhaps a study of the achievements of Islam may throw some light on how the integration of world society is likely to come about, and may even suggest ways in which man may consciously contribute to this process."* Watt (1961: 1).

In Islam, social differences are recognized as something that shows the greatness of God rather than the greatness or superiority of one colour, language, or race, or nation over another. It accepts the fact that people are different and that they are created differently as creations of God (al-Qur'an 30: 22 & al-Qur'an 49:13). The emphasis of Islam on unity based on nobility, equality and justice, and brotherhood within the diversity of ethnics and cultures is to promote recognition and integration instead of exclusiveness, nationalism, racialism and group division which are condemned in Islam. The integration of society is directly and indirectly promoted in Islam because Islam is the only system of life which considers the entire mankind to be of one family, binds humans into a fraternity and establishes a world society or community which we call *Ummah* (al-Mawdudi, 1982).

Furthermore, mankind is intrinsically sociable by nature. Man has a natural sense of group living, for he knows in his innermost being that he is unable to live alone. Man has the need to live in a society which allows him to communicate and interact with others; at the same time, it creates a special sense of belonging to others. The emphasis is on coming together, unity and the rejection of everything divisive as mentioned by Prophet Muhammad PBUH: *"God's hand is with the community"* (Al-Tirmidzi, 2000).

A well-integrated society can be identified where each of its parts must maintain its own identity yet related to one another so that all may function together smoothly and efficiently. Otherwise, they will be infested with conflicts and cannot function harmoniously and effectively, becoming an ill-integrated society (Sharif, 1965). Obviously, a society will never be for Muslims only, for being a Muslim and a believer does not mean that non-Muslims or non-believers lose their human rights in any society. Muslims have been instructed not to seek dissension with them unnecessarily but to live with them with the spirit of coexistence, peace and amity. The Qur'an states that just and proper treatment should be given towards the disbelievers (al-Qur'an 60: 8)

Therefore, Islam rejects any quarrel and disputes among people in society especially among believers. Moreover, Islam is a religion that maintains peaceful coexistence and integration within a society by putting disputes aside and emphasizing more on the concept of unity and brotherhood. Allah SWT mentions in the Holy Qur'an (al-Quran 8: 46). The Prophet PBUH also informs in his Hadith: *"The man who is most hateful to God is the one who quarrels and disputes most."* (Al-Bukhari, 1998).

3. The Methodology of the Prophet in the Integration of Society

The integration of society is one of the important aspects brought by Prophet Muhammad PBUH during his lifetime, as he was the one who built a peaceful society in Islamic Era where there were Muslims, Arabs, Christians and Jews living together. The difference and diversity experienced by the Prophet PBUH at that particular time was a perfect reference for mankind, especially Muslims who were living within a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. Although men were created with many differences, they originally came from the same lineage and can be distinguished only by religion and their piety, as highlighted by the Prophet PBUH: *"Indeed your lineage are not insult upon one person, because all of you are sons of Adam, no one from you are preferred or better than one another except due to religion or piety, and it is enough for (destruction of) men to be incredibly lewdly, miserly and obscenely"* (Ibn Hanbal, 2001). Unity is the first and foremost principle that emphasized by Islam in integrating of society *"O Mankind, your lord is one and your father is one. You all descend from Adam, and Adam was created from earth. He is most honoured among*

you in the sight of God who is most upright. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, no coloured person to a white person, or a white person to a coloured person except by taqwa." (IbnHanbal, 2001).

Since the order to unite and prevention to divide with each other was mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, the Messenger PBUH did not keep silent about the importance of unity and the danger of division in the societies (AbiDaud, 1999). He also gave a serious warning to the people who try to harm any society or community (Muslim, 2003; al-Nasaie, 2002). Moreover, the Prophet PBUH described the closer man to his God is the one who protected the prosperity of the society (Al-Bukhari, 1998). In order to uphold unity among societies, the dangers of disunity also should be highlighted because the division will weaken the society which leads to total destruction.

Unity and brotherhood are closely related with each other. Brotherhood shows common bonds between two or more persons who cooperate, coordinate, act in the interest of each other, work and struggle together for their common survival. It is a reflection of unity which merges human relationship based on the concept of humanity. The term of Brotherhood that is emphasized in Islam is discovered in a wider concept. The foundation of this brotherhood is not a mere relationship joined by blood or race, but formed with the belief which perceives that the whole community of believers as a great Brotherhood (al-Qur'an 49: 10). To support the concept of brotherhood mentioned in the Qur'an, the Prophet PBUH pointed out that brotherhood is not only based on faith, but it is a part and an element of the faith (al-Bukhari, 1998). He earnestly put great effort to build and maintain good relations between Muslims regardless of the background, lineage and social status by highlighting that Allah is fulfilling the need of a person who willingly fulfill the need of his brothers (al-Bukhari, 1998).

In another context of the integration of society is the promotion of justice which has been one of the important message of the Prophet PBUH. The significance of justice as emphasized in the Qur'an is noticeably highlighted in the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH. He sought to explain abstract meaning of justice enunciated in the Qur'an by specific examples, expressed in legal and ethical terms, to distinguish between just and unjust acts as well as to set underlying rules indicating what the scale of justice ought to be (Khadduri, 1984). He was sent to the earth as the last messenger of God not only to bring mercy for all mankind, but to establish justice in society. The just society in Islam means the society that secures and maintains respect for people through various social arrangements that are in the common interest of all members. Justice in Islam also means justice for all people irrespective of religion, colour, or race, which results in the better integration among people in a society.

The Prophet Muhammad PBUH faced a number of incidents to testify his justice. He lived in a place where people of different religions, languages, races and tribes all co-existed. Due to that, the justice of the Prophet PBUH was the source of peace and security for other communities, just as much as it was for Muslims. As an encouragement to be just, he mentioned about a reward for those who establishes justice among people (al-Bukhari, 1998) and there will be a reward and a punishment for just and unjust people reflectively (AbiDaud, 1999).

Justice and equality have similar significance in the society. If justice means to put everything in the right place which balances all things in the organized way and harmony (Ayoub, 1996), equality means to have fairness and equal opportunity among people in all of their living and their social activities. The nature of equality in the law of Islam is based on a purely innate appreciation for the humanity, because they are creatures of one God, sons of one father, and are going to the one fate (Khalil, 1973). Prophet Muhammad PBUH once mentioned that all people are the descendants from one father and one mother, and they are brothers to one another (IbnHanbal, 2001). The establishment of equality for the entire human race strike at the very root of all distinctions on any bases, even for the Messenger of God. The superiority of one man over another is only base on the consciousness of God, purity of character and high morals, and not on the basis of colour, race, language or nationality (IbnHanbal, 2001).

To promote the integration in society, the terms that discussed earlier; unity, brotherhood, justice, and equality are very important and can be considered as the condition of peace and harmony in society. As a religion of peace, Islam promotes peace and understanding among people of all faiths, and it strongly prohibits all forms of violence and aggression against all people regardless of their faith or race. In maintaining peace, Islam rejects any quarrel, disputes and disagreement (al-Qur'an 8: 46) among people in

society especially among believers (al-Bukhari, 1998) but it doesn't mean that the non-believers can argue among themselves.

Thus, to be identified, a well-integrated society can be known where each of its parts must maintain its own identity and each must be related to others so that all may function together smoothly and efficiently. Otherwise, they will be infested with conflicts and cannot function harmoniously and effectively as an ill-integrated society (Sharif, 1965). Obviously, the society will never be for Muslims only, for being as a Muslim and a believer does not mean that non-Muslim or non-believer lost their human rights in any society. Muslims have been instructed not to seek dissension with them unnecessarily but to live with them with the spirit of coexistence, peace and amity, because just and proper treatment should be given towards the disbelievers as well (al-Qur'an 60: 8).

4. *Madinah al-Munawwarah*: The Best Model of an Integrated Society

According to Glasse (1989), *Madinah al-Nabiyy*(city of the Prophet) with its usually added epithet *al-Munawwarah*(the radiant) is situated in the province of Saudi Arabia. The name 'Madinah' which means 'the City' was not given coincidentally, but was exclusively chosen by the Prophet PBUH where at the same time he completely prohibited the usage of the former name, Yathrib. The greatness of Madinah as the city of the Prophet PBUH is not only in the past hundred years ago, but its greatness continues until today. Madinah at the Prophet's time consists of diverse society where there were two Arab tribes; the Aws and Khazraj, both of South Arabian origins, and several Jewish tribes; the BaniNadhir, the BaniQaynuqa', and the BaniQurayzah, in addition to the living Muslims from *Muhajirin* and *Ansar*. This study specifically selects the past society during the Prophet's time and not the recent society living in Madinah because the society which was established by the Prophet PBUH can be considered as the best example of a stable and secure society. This society also was regarded as the first Islamic society which was shaped after the Muslim conquests and very important to be a role model in enhancing the integration of society especially which diverse in terms of ethnicity, religions or cultures. The Muslim residents of Madinah at that time were freely and openly practicing Islam, worshipping Allah SWT and following the orders of the Prophet PBUH, unlike the situation which prevailed in Makkah before *hijrah* where Muslims were oppressed and suffered from the oppression. The Prophet PBUH ruled over both Muslims and non-Muslims and managed their affairs just after the migration from Makkah, and his aim in Madinah was not only to build an example of a harmonious community but a religious community based on the revelations.

In establishing a religious community, the Prophet PBUH began to structure it by forming the society on a solid foundation, building a mosque with various functions, and approving a constitution among the Madinan societies as well as by gathering the appropriate forces in order to be able to protect the city and convey the important message of Islam. There are some significant reasons to be highlighted in the declaration of Madinah as the first Islamic city in history.

The reason of the reliance of the Madinan society is based on two primary authenticated sources; the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. In other words, the Madinan society had full commitment to the dictates of the *Shari'ah* of Islam which provides full guidance for personal, domestic, social, economic, and political lives (Rauf, 1991). The emphasis on the practice of liberty, justice, equality, peace and collective well-being is very important in an Islamic state. The Prophet PBUH asked the practice of equal rights to apply to all ethnic, racial, cultural, tribal and religious groups as he did in the Constitution of Madinah where non-Muslims from the Jews and Arab tribes had autonomy and enjoyed as much liberty as the Muslims. This practice followed the Qur'anic teachings that all the differences that existed in a society are signs of Allah's Mercy and indicative of identity (al-Qur'an, 30: 22) and plurality in society is also a will of Allah SWT (al-Qur'an 5: 48) as well as an opportunity to know, connect and integrate with each other (al-Qur'an 49: 13). So, Madinah became an Islamic city due to its classless society in which there was justice and equality for all and it did not discriminate on the basis of religion, origin, or on any other basis.

The principle of *Syara'* (mutual consultation) as the Qur'an clearly asked the people to practice *Syara'* in any affairs (al-Qur'an 42: 38, 3: 159). For instance, he listened to the views of his companions when any of them offered his opinion and he himself sought their views over important issues (Rauf, 1991). Thus, *Syara'* should be faithfully practiced in order to preserve the major opinions of the people, maintain their rights in the process of decision-making and provide a system of check and balance. It can be summarized that the Islamic city or state or country must enforce and implement all guidelines which are highlighted in the *Shari'ah* for the betterment of mankind. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH has built an integrated society

based on religious foundations of social, political and economic system, and his efforts achieved great success where they have become a great role model nowadays.

5. Conclusion

A society needs the best reference as a guideline to live in harmony and peace. The Prophet has encouraged maintaining unity to his companions, establishing brotherhood, promoting justice, preserving equality and look forward to living in peace. It is a continuous and universal message which will remain to all human being. All the efforts in developing Madinan society in terms of social, politics, economic and so on should be good example to be practised in all countries. The integration of society is not a new message. It was highlighted and practiced since centuries ago, and it is very significance in maintaining a peaceful coexistence in society. Besides that, there is no single person who wants to live alone in a particular place, even people who live in an island too have to ensure their life are not in danger and to survive in peace and harmony, what more the people who are living in a multicultural and multi-religious country. However, the approach in integration could not be simply based on their lust and desire; it should assimilate to the guidance of previous generation. The guidance left by the Prophet in the form of his speech and actions is sufficient for Muslims as well as non-Muslims all over the world to achieve true success in integrating society and peacefully living together.

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