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 focus 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. Muslims, 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 promotes 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