

ISLAM AND THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE WEST

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Abstract

This paper discusses Islam and the problem of social integration in the west. It examines the social values which facilitate proper social Integration in the west without denying Muslims their due right to practice their religion, amid vexing challenges of marginalization which is becoming more unbearable forcing them to abandon their Islamic Identity. The Paper suggested solutions calling the attention of political authorities to make rational approach by treating Islam as a friend not an enemy of the society. Muslims should be given the opportunity to contribute in advancing the interest of their nation without intimidation or racial discrimination.

KEYWORDS: Islam, Integration, Society, Values, Moral Persuasion

1 Introduction

The first major contact between Islam and Europe was in the year 92AH/711CE, when Tariq b Ziyad crossed with his forces a strait that is later known to his name, to raid on the Iberian Peninsula, thereby establishing al-Andalus (Hispania) (al-Shinnawy, 2002). The presence of Muslims in Andalus continued for centuries, bringing vast civilization to the region (al-Samrani, Zannun Taha, & Matlub. 2000). Another Muslim Empire that had historical relationship with Europe was the Ottomans, which until 1920s remained an important player to be reckoned with in political arena (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). The civilization disseminated by these Empires contributed immensely to the current western civilization, yet many European writers refuse to acknowledge any Islamic contribution. In the late 20th century, many Muslims immigrated to Europe, and now Islam is widely considered to be the fastest growing faith, with Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Macedonia having the largest Muslims population in Europe (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Due to historical political tension between Islamic world and the west, only few western people envisage new horizons of social cooperation, with Muslims

given a recognized role in making that possible. As a matter of fact, the attitude shown to Muslims in the west only indicates that under no circumstances should Muslims be trusted, and are therefore put in a condition that may lead to their annihilation unless if they abandon their faith. Practicing regular religious teachings does not only become problematic, religious symbols are also wiped out by States' authorities, amid growing policies which seem out of realization unless Islam is driven out of the west. For instance in 2004 religious signs and clothing was banned in France, and Muslims street prayers became prohibited in September 2011 (Index Censorship, 2013), making Muslims second class human beings whose rights can be always sacrificed or compromised in favor of others. The most striking now is maintaining the true Islamic Identity whilst at the same fulfilling the statesmanship in the west with the religion now becoming target for people's mocking. This paper therefore set forth some moral and social values upon which Muslims especially those living in the society of the non-Muslim majority will reaffirm their Islamic Identity.

2. MUSLIMS AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE WEST

The definition of Social Integration has been herculean. But to understand the concept, United Nation Research Institute for Social Development (1994) emphasized on one to take the cognizance of at least three major elements. The first is Social Inclusion, which implies equal opportunities and rights for the improvement of life. The second is conjuring up the image of an unwanted imposition of uniformity, whereas the third element centered on establishing patterns of human relation in any given society. Social Integration therefore means *a process where members of a given society, regardless of their cultural or religious diversities, set for themselves a compelling group-solidarity and a strong bond of cohesion, the achievement of which provides avenue for national development*. Achievement of such integration requires principles to be set, accessible to everyone on relatively equal bases, which should be based on respects, responsibilities, rights and justice.

The western Society today advocates democratic, economic and philosophical principles towards Social Integration, but when that include Muslim minority, they refuse to accept them and their faith. As matter of fact, warning against the threat of Islam in western society is not new, all of which lack any substantial evidence. The motivating factors for such warnings include but not limited to the historical rivalry between the east from where the teachings of the scriptures including Quran emanated, and the west. That rivalry continued to feature in the western society. Western media in their end also play their role in distorting the image of Islam and Muslim communities in the west. Another factor is the violent reactions of some youths among the Muslims. Discussing these factors requires a separate paper, but to wrap them all, do the factors make Islam enemy of the development? Does Islam pose threat to the west? Social Integration requires an individual to feel safe and

secured in the settled environment. It is necessary upon predominant western communities to make Muslims as well as other minority feel at home, their entity to be recognized by allowing them to express themselves. The minority on the other hand are obliged to cooperate with understanding to become adapted socially.

Shavit (2007) in his article titled "*Should Muslims integrate into the west?*" concluded with some vital questions, claiming that of all religious or ethnic minorities who seek to establish themselves within multi-cultural societies, only Muslims jurists demand what may be served as a substitute for the liberal states, seeking a place for their beliefs and traditions within a pluralistic framework. This view is not the right dimension of assessing the situation, Muslims only demand for the recognition of their religious entity. At this point, western societies should redefine the word religion from its narrow English connotation to a wider scope when referring to Islam. Islamic religion is a complete way of life which forms the basic principles that regulate the Muslims' conduct. The demand therefore is for the western society to allow Muslims fulfill the statesmanship whilst at the same time fulfilling the demand of their faith. Some may criticize them for dual loyalty, but as long as it is realistically possible, such criticisms are not rational. According to a study conducted in 2009 on Muslims integration in Europe, the data indicated highly religious and socially conservative Muslims are eager to contribute and play a more recognized role in advancing the best interest of their nation (Mogahed, 2009). In the same vein, Islamic principles do not militate against any civilized social values of integration so long as it is within the bounds of decency and morality.

Looking deeper into the attitude of the western Society to Christianity being the largest religion, one will find that the religion in its classical sense doesn't constitute western socio-political system. In fact two people call themselves Christians, yet view the religion from the different angles. A particular class of people among Christians emphasizes practicing the religion of Jesus which requires one to live as Jesus lived. Another class on the other hand prefers religion about Jesus, only emphasizing the inner, spiritual encounter with Jesus himself as the source of one's action (Baker, 2005). Most people in the west seem to have chosen the latter nowadays, restricting themselves only to insights gained through Bible reading or ecstatic experience. This implies that one can be religious in the west even without necessarily involving into regular religious teachings. That is why Morgan (2014) mentioned religious compromises in favor of being American, such as changing some of the religious expressions to English or introducing chairs and benches to the Mosques in lieu of sitting on the knees or on the floor, simply because in American people sit on chairs and benches.

Western powers set out their standards to be respected by its societies long before mass immigration of the Muslims, but when a considerable number of Muslims became part of the society, they need to reliably accommodate them and their faiths. Integration should not impose belief conformity in the society. European Society

should only concentrate on Social Integration rather than forced assimilation, in which Muslims will be demanded to abandon their faith as a condition for assimilating into the western society. Muslims coerce no one to accept their values and beliefs, contrary to what Pegida claimed of the danger of being Islamized, thereby losing their freedom and democracy (Noak, 2015). It is clear that the objective of Pegida protest was to incite hatred against the Muslims. Some government officials in the west may call for the cancelation of such inciting hatred rally, but that remains on the level of individual opinions rather than being presented as a state demand, neglecting of which is detrimental to national development.

3.0 ISLAM AND FORMATION OF HUMAN SOCIETY

Man in his Society is free to make choices for his life-style, but Islam gives him guiding principles for moral guidance. The teachings of Islam in one's social, political, and economic relations require man to learn and follow the moral teachings of the religion. According to the Quran, the origin and development of the human society is a divine plan of Allah the Exalted, beginning at the level of family formation in which individuals cooperate with one another to establish a family. Allah Almighty says thus:

“O mankind! We have created you male and female, and made you unto nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has al-Taqwa (piousness). Verily Allah is All-Knowing Well-Acquainted (with things).

Individuals interact with one another for their social, political or economic need, and such social groups gradually develop into tribes and nation. Ibn Khaldun (2010) observed how a particular tribe cooperates with one another to develop their social relation by virtue of al-Asabiyyah (group-solidarity). That Asabiyyah ambition motivates them to conquer members of other society. He also explained how in a stage that Asabiyyah makes them commit injustice against others, unless they are restrained with strong moral persuasion found in the religious teachings. Religion therefore guarantees the maintenance of peace, order and stability in the society.

Human cooperation in an ideal Society requires education, religion, economy, political life and law. Muslims minority in Western Europe are to benefit from these social values should they preserve their Islamic Identity. The most important among the values is the religion upon which other values are measured. However, the word society which means in Arabic *al-Mujtama'* is not suitable term of reference in the Quran and Sunnah. Proper social order which is *Ummah* (One nation) is usually preferred. Allah the Exalted said:

“Truly, this your Ummah is one religion and I am your Lord, therefore worship me (Alone)” (21: 92).

We shall now examine closely such social values which keep human society intact, facilitating proper social integration in the West as well as other human societies.

3.1 Education

Human culture is refined and able to grow to a significant level in human civilization with Education. Western education concentrates efforts and attentions to crafts and professions. Religion which provides meaning and value to morality is generally ignored. Allah the Most High extolled the status of those having knowledge in the Quran, those are aware of the teachings of Islam and act upon it. He says thus:

“Allah bear witness that La Ilaaha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He) and the Angels and those having knowledge (also give witness), He (always) maintains His creation in Justice. None has the right to be worshipped but He, the Almighty, the All-Wise” (3: 18)

He the Exalted also said:

“...It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allah. Verily Allah is All-Mighty, Oft-Forgiving” (35: 28)

The religious education is the most important necessity of life, and then that knowledge which in one way or the other supports ones' economic needs, followed by any knowledge which serves humanity. In the west, parents will find no alternative but to let their children study sex education, art, music and other subjects that Islam deemed prohibited (Tatari, 2009). The western school's curriculum in itself plays a central role in distorting the image of Islam and Muslims in the west. Furthermore, western writers often emphasize the need for the western powers to be selective concerning Islamic education, wishing to create a new version of Islam which is purely western in nature. Katrine Anspaha (2008) in discussing the Muslim Integration in Europe stated measures to be taken by the European leaders against what she called Muslim radicalization. She said Imams should be educated and certified not in Muslim countries but in Europe. The same suggestion set forth by Morgan (2014), calling on the authorities to develop a process of nurturing the American Imams in a purely secular community by education as well as by liturgical endorsement. This clearly shows the attitude of the west to Islam making it the enemy of the national development to suffice saying whatever the compromises are, never will such people be pleased with the Muslims till the day Muslims abandon their faiths. Racial philosophy of designing the curriculum of education and its implementation is not wise in building human culture and civilization.

Education helps Muslims identify the realities and challenges facing them by providing to them principles of wisdom to achieving all of their objectives of life, including studying the right approach to convince the western society the need to respect religious values. This can only be achieved when Islamic teachings feature in the Muslims life, and when the strong Islamic education becomes a dynamic force in

the lives of the Muslims youths. Achieving such objectives is a long journey acquired only to those who are patient. In that sense scholars and callers to Islam need to persuade the youths about the importance and the benefit of seeking both religious education and other non-directly religious education, for it should be sought for the right and clear objectives. They need to remind them of the blessings and rewards Allah grants to the students of knowledge. According to what Muslim reported, on the authority of Abu Hurayrah (May Allah be pleased with him), who reported the Prophet (peace be upon him) to have said: “*whoever pursue a path to seek knowledge therein, Allah will thereby make easy for him a path to paradise*” (Muslim related)

At this point in time, scholars should emphasize the need of getting that knowledge from the correct source. In the same vein, they should warn them against following the conjecture and deceptions in matters of religion. The truth is Allah’s Book and the Prophet’s Sunnah, as their enemies may try to exploit differences among them and conflicts to mislead them.

3.2 Religion

Education helps man to achieve the quality and objectives of life, but it is religion that gives him benefit to enjoy the fruits of his achievements. Religion regulates Muslim’s actions, making him realize the purpose of life. Islamic principles of morality are to be held irrespective of the religious differences and avoiding religion only leads to disaster and dooms in life. Western States may claim to have been following the moral principles, but the real problem is related to the faulty source of such principles which can neither protect man nor can it guarantee success in life.

Many people in the west as already stated perceive Islam as a threat to their socio-political system, which is the reason behind restrictions to Muslims, denying their right to religious expressions. Islamic dress, burial grounds, public prayers and many other Islamic teachings are all banned in many states, including France, yet people like Morgan, unequivocally demand remodeling some vital teachings like ablution, the Arabic Islamic greetings as well as making mosques conducive for women and men to sit together with their families during worship gatherings. These are the vexing challenges facing Muslims in such society, all of which require penetrating analysis within the premises of the Islamic Shariah. The tendency of avoiding the religious teachings or setting a so-called new version of the Islam only lead to cold annihilation of Muslims by dissolving their Islamic Identity.

3.3 Economy

Economy is undoubtedly an important pillar concerning the life of man in his society, providing him the basic needs of sustenance as well as his luxurious ambitions. But in Islam, wealth and fortunes are provided by Allah, and therefore a believer should spend according to His ordinance. Allah the Exalted said:

“Verily Allah is the Provider, Owner of Power, the Most-Strong”
(52: 58)

Ibn Kathir (1999) explained in his commentary of the above verse that the purpose of human life is not limited to the acquisition of wealth, but for human beings to use it in worshipping Allah the Exalted, glorifying Him of His grace. Evil accumulation of wealth or regarding it to be purpose of one’s life is downgraded in many legal injunctions, Allah Almighty says:

“Leave them eat and enjoy, and let them be preoccupied with (false) hope. They will come to know” (15: 3)

Key issues related to Muslims economic life include high unemployment rate. The increasing crime rate of the Muslims youths due to poor economic strength is relatively higher, and overall, there is need for improvement (Tatari, 2009).

3.4 Political life and law

Politics and law are also important pillars of human relation necessary for their welfare, development, maintenance of peace and political stability. Politics requires justice and justice can only be measured by a scale of strong moral persuasion found in religion. In that case one will find the universal recognized values of humanity are all laid down by Islam. Many moral virtues are in par with that of the Islamic teachings. Law and liberty are within the premises of morality and legal discipline. Muslims especially in the west cannot demand the inclusion of the Islamic moral principles in their respective Countries, but can seek for remodeling the framework of some principles like freedom of expression. It shouldn’t be a one day task, but a journey of a hundred miles start with a single step. Western societies value intellectual and academic discussions, and with that, many of them will be convinced about the great wisdom of restudying their principles on the basis of decency and respect.

If one refers to the political issues, he will find that there is the problem of who is to represent Muslims politically (Tatari, 2009). Representative bodies that represent the Muslims voices, speaking on their behalf are strongly needed to assure their rightful place in the society. Islam and the West may differ on some matters, but that doesn’t necessarily imply conflict.

These social values will not only sound applicable in Islamic countries, Muslims living in the society of the non-Muslim majority will also not have it beyond their scope, since we cannot expect them to apply them on relatively equal bases. That is why these values are matters of discussion in most Islamic books of jurisprudence and prophetic traditions.

4. SOME MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING THE ISLAMIC VALUES AND SOCIETY

It is important to discuss some misconceptions concerning some terms associated with Muslims and Islam. Such terms are Tolerance, which simply means quality of enduring opinions, beliefs or practices of others. Muslims in the society of the non-Muslims majority may tolerate certain things that are at variance with the teachings of their religion, but that doesn't mean buying it. For instance, Muslims may be in a position to tolerate some insulting manners shown to them or their religious signs, especially in the middle of diplomacy and negotiations. But that doesn't mean befriending those committing it. Another term is that of *Darura* (Necessity), it should not connote standing idly by in favor of the policies that are against the teachings of Islam. The Prophet peace be upon him said: *“Who among you sees (what Shariah deemed) wrong should change it with his hand, if he couldn't then with his tongue, only if he could not then one should change it in his heart and that is the weakest form of Iman”* (Muslim related). Muslims therefore should seek remodeling of what is not in favor of their religion like the mass surveillances imposed on Muslims by NYPD, but should do so with diplomacy and negotiations. In the same vein, Muslims should not in the non-Muslim society disintegrate for matters in which there are divergent of opinions between Scholars. They should respect their differences as only Quran, Sunnah and Consensus are unquestionable. But if one refuted an unequivocal ruling from the Quran and Sunnah, then no loyalty should be enjoyed by him from the Muslims. Allah the Exalted said:

“You (O Muhammad peace be upon him) will not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, making friendship with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers or their sons or kindred...” (59: 22)

Similarly, Integration doesn't mean involving in those things Islam deemed prohibited or even respecting those who commit such things, let alone liking them. But if the state deemed such actions constitutional, then Muslims in that case can tolerate them. Allah the Exalted said:

“Say (O Muhammad peace be upon him): “(But), the things that my lord has indeed forbidden are al-Fawasiq (great evil sins and every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse) whether committed openly or secretly, sins (of all kinds) unrighteous oppression, joining partners (in worship) with Allah for which he has given no authority, and saying things about Allah which you have no knowledge” (7: 33)

The messenger of Allah peace be upon him said: *“Person is likely to follow the faith of his friend, so look who you befriend”* (al-Tirmidhi & Abu Dawud).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has been discussing Islam and the problem of social integration in the west. The paper examined some social values upon which proper social integration may be achieved without Muslims abandoning their faith in the west to guarantee their rightful place in the western society. The paper emphasized the need for meaningful social integration, but also pointed that belief conformity should not be within its scope. Some of the potentially misconceived terms have been also highlighted. Muslim Society needs education for the preparation of their members; wisdom guides them to success while strong economy helps them satisfy their basic necessities of life. They also need strong moral persuasion for the maintenance of political stability and peace, only then can their education and economy become useful. The effectiveness of their moral code however is only found in the teachings of the religion which helps them to administer justice and tolerance. The role, nature and relationship between religion and society have been frequently put under scrutiny by scholars and thinkers, and despite religion being seen by some as anachronistic, it remains instrumental to civilization and social development. In the light of what have been discussed, the paper recommends the following:

- Authorities in the west should be reasonable by not depriving Muslims their due right of earning the love and grace of their Creator, the Exalted.
- Educational curriculums should be reviewed to correct the untruthful image of Islam for foreseeable future in the west.
- Moral teachings of Islam should feature in Muslims life, to be able to make those western individuals who were prevented to know the undistorted image of Islam, perceive the truth.
- There is need for intellectual dialogue, discussing religion as a moral source of guidance and its relevance to our educational, social, economic and political life of the society.

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