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Integration of Races and Ethnicities from the Islamic Perspectives

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Abstract

Integration involves adapting to diverse cultures in a way that all ethnic groups accept. Malaysia focuses on building a national identity among communities with different cultural, religious, and social backgrounds. This process is supported through various efforts, including politics, education, and social development. From an Islamic viewpoint, integration goes beyond Muslim circles and emphasizes harmonious relations with non-Muslims. Islam promotes tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation, as highlighted in *Surah al-Hujurat*, verse 13. Successful integration requires collective effort and strong commitment from all groups. This article explores Islamic teachings on integration, based on the Quran, Hadith, and scholars' insights. It identifies key principles such as piety, adherence to Islamic teachings, and the goal of earning Allah's pleasure. Integration is vital for strengthening the ummah, promoting unity, and following the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) example. The article also warns of the dangers of ignoring integration, which include damaging Islam's image, losing Allah's mercy, and facing divine displeasure. Finally, it outlines practical steps to strengthen unity, such as fostering mutual understanding, creating a positive environment, avoiding conflict, and appreciating the value of unity.

Keywords: Integration, unity, race, ethnicity, ummah

Introduction

According to *Kamus Dewan* (2010), integration refers to merging two or more races (elements, parts, etc.) into a unified whole. Baharuddin (2012) elaborates that integration is the process of adapting various cultures and social characteristics in a way that all ethnic groups can accept. In the Malaysian context, integration involves the creation of a national identity among ethnic communities that differ in culture, religion, social structures, and residential patterns. This unity is promoted through political, economic, social, cultural, educational, and regional integration.

From a broader perspective, human unity is built upon three fundamental aspects. First is shared human nature: despite ethnic, racial, national, and religious differences, all humans possess the same essential human traits. Second, diversity exists for mutual recognition and cooperation: it is through diversity that individuals and groups are introduced to one another, fostering understanding and sharing. Third, the responsibility to protect the earth: one of the key duties of humankind is to develop and maintain the earth's well-being. These three foundations are central to achieving harmonious ethnic integration.

A historical example of inclusive integration in Islam can be found in the Constitution of Medina (*Sahifah Medina*), which clearly states that Muslims and non-Muslims constitute a single community and must support one another in fulfilling their shared responsibilities (Muis et al., 2021).

In Islam, integration encompasses all humanity, grounded in the belief that all humans originate from a single source. This is in line with the words of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

“O mankind! Remember that your Lord is One, and your father is one (i.e., Prophet Adam). There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor for a non-Arab over an Arab; neither for a white person over a black person, nor for a black person over a white person except in piety.”
(Narrated by Ahmad and al-Baihaqi)

Despite these ideals, there are numerous challenges to achieving integration. Prejudice, racism, discrimination, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism can lead to social divisions. Conflicts between social groups shaped by class, education, work skills, income, and lifestyle may hinder social mobility and contribute to persistent poverty. These issues are further compounded by the rising cost of living, inadequate public services, unemployment, marginalization, inequality, social problems, and secret societies. Additionally, differences in language, culture, thought, and religion based on ethnic lines pose challenges to achieving strong unity in Malaysia's pluralistic society.

Literature Review

Several scholarly works have examined the concept of integration, particularly from Islamic and Malaysian perspectives. In their study, Muis et al. (2021) explore the concept of ethnic integration through the lens of Islamic-based development, concerning contemporary Malaysian society. They categorise the concept into three key components: *tasawur* (worldview), principles, and goals. Islamic-based development is rooted in the oneness of Allah (*tawhid*), Islamic epistemology, and a comprehensive worldview. Unlike conventional Western development models, which often separate material and spiritual domains, Islamic-based development integrates physical and spiritual dimensions in all aspects of societal progress. In this context, integrating diverse communities is seen as a critical agenda in promoting unity and peace, especially in a multi-ethnic nation such as Malaysia. Their work underscores the significance of *wasatiyyah* (moderation) and the importance of fostering integration between Muslims and non-Muslims across various spheres of life, including development.

Another relevant study by Sarifin, Sukimi, and Abdullah (2018) investigates the use of the Bawean language among the Bawean ethnic community in daily interactions. Their findings reveal that the Bawean language is actively used across generations for everyday communication within the ethnic group. However, Malay emerges as the dominant language when interacting with members of different sub-ethnicities. The study concludes that there is no significant generational gap in the usage

of the Bawean language. Furthermore, the Bawean community demonstrates a positive attitude toward national integration through language, indicating their commitment to building a Malaysian identity.

In contrast, Abdullah (2010) presents a more critical perspective, highlighting the complexities of racial integration in Malaysia. He argues that socio-political dynamics among various ethnic groups remain deeply racialized. Influential agents such as historical narratives, education systems, media, political parties, and non-governmental organisations have contributed to a political culture where each ethnic group prioritizes its interests. This racially charged socio-political environment has intensified ethnic sentiments, thereby hindering genuine integration efforts and leaving the vision of national unity ambiguous.

Integration According to Islam

From the Islamic perspective, integration is not limited to Muslim relations but extends to non-Muslims. Islam strongly encourages its followers to maintain good relationships by practicing tolerance, respect, and mutual assistance. Proper integration can only be achieved when all members of society cooperate, stand united, and make firm commitments toward peaceful coexistence.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

The example of the believers in their mutual love, compassion, and sympathy is like that of one body: when one part is in pain, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever. (Narrated by Bukhari)

Islam recognises the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, regardless of race or ethnicity. Discrimination and the denial of rights based on ethnicity are, therefore, contrary to Islamic principles. Allah created human beings with diversity in form, race, and culture as a natural and divine law. This diversity is not intended to be a cause for division or hostility but a means for mutual recognition and cooperation (Muslim, Musa & Buang, 2011).

This is in line with the verse of the Quran:

O mankind! Indeed, We have created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. (Surah al-Hujurat: 13)

According to this verse, Islam teaches that all humans share a common origin in the Prophet Adam (peace be upon him). Regardless of skin colour or ethnicity, all humans are part of one extended family. Race and appearance are external characteristics that distinguish one another, not causes for conflict or prejudice. While it is natural for humans to feel affection toward their ethnic group, Islam forbids this from leading to tyranny or injustice against others (Rohana et al., 2017).

Fathi (1997) emphasises that this Quranic verse lays the foundation of pluralism, encouraging interaction, cooperation, and mutual support, rather than isolation or conflict. All human beings are equal in Allah's eyes, regardless of their physical, cultural, or religious differences. Even religious differences exist because of Allah's will, as He has granted humanity the freedom to choose between belief and disbelief (Muslim, Musa & Buang, 2011).

This idea is echoed in another verse:

O mankind! Be conscious of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from both spread many men and women. And be mindful of Allah through whom you ask one another, and of family ties. Surely, Allah is ever watchful over you. (Surah an-Nisaa': 1)

Under Islamic governance, non-Muslim communities are recognised as *ahl al-dhimmah*, people under the protection of the Islamic state. This protection encompasses safety and security, similar to the concept of citizenship. These communities have rights and responsibilities as citizens, as prescribed by the Quran and the Hadith (Rohana et al., 2017).

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warned:

Whoever hurts a dhimmi (non-Muslim under Muslim protection), he has hurt me; and whoever hurts me, has hurt Allah. (Narrated by al-Tabrani)

Historical records show that non-Muslims lived peacefully under Islamic rule. A truly Islamic society upholds religious teachings, fulfils Allah's commandments, and treats all citizens justly. The Quran permits Muslims to maintain good relationships with non-Muslims, as long as they do not show hostility towards Islam.

As stated in the Quran:

Allah does not forbid you from being kind and just to those who have not fought against you because of your religion, nor expelled you from your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who act justly. (Surah al-Mumtahanah: 8)

Islam explicitly forbids assisting one's ethnic group in committing injustice. The concept of *asabiyyah* (tribalism or ethnic chauvinism), which was prevalent during the pre-Islamic era of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*), is strongly condemned in Islam. *Asabiyyah* becomes dangerous when it replaces religious guidance and promotes blind loyalty that leads to oppression (Muslim, Musa & Buang, 2011).

The Prophet (PBUH) said:

He is not one of us who calls to asabiyyah, or fights for asabiyyah, or dies for asabiyyah. When asked what asabiyyah means, the Prophet replied: 'Helping your own people in wrongdoing.' (Shams-ul-haq Azeemabadi, 1990)

According to al-Qardhawi (1989), Islam has established a unique framework for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, based on tolerance, justice, compassion, and goodwill—unprecedented

principles before Islam's advent. Muslims are therefore required to act justly and kindly towards all people, including non-Muslims, as long as they do not oppose Islam. However, conflicts often arise when base desires, fanaticism, narrow-mindedness, and selfishness drive humans.

Hawwa (2003) reiterates that differences in race, colour, nationality, lineage, and family are not meant to divide people but to foster mutual recognition and love. He stresses that all human beings are equal in their humanity, regardless of external attributes, and that no individual or nation is superior to another.

Principles of Islamic Integration

Islam provides a comprehensive framework for integration based on divine guidance. From the Islamic perspective, three foundational principles underlie proper integration: piety to Allah, adherence to the Quran and Hadith, and the ultimate goal of seeking Allah's pleasure.

Piety to Allah (Taqwa)

Faith (*iman*) and piety (*taqwa*) are core elements in a Muslim's life. Without either, one's faith remains incomplete and does not meet the characteristics of a true believer. Faith is manifested through the verbal declaration of truth, sincere belief in the heart, and the consistent implementation of Islamic teachings in daily life. On the other hand, Taqwa reflects a consciousness of Allah that leads one to obey His commands and avoid His prohibitions (Ministry of Religious Affairs of Brunei Darussalam, 2021).

Adherence to the Quran and Hadith

The Quran and the Hadith are the two primary sources of Islamic teachings. They serve as the ultimate references for Muslims in both religious and worldly matters. Every aspect of life should align with these two sources to ensure compliance with Islamic principles and to avoid deviation from the path of truth.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

I leave behind me two things; you will never go astray as long as you hold fast to them: the Book of Allah and my Sunnah.
(Narrated by Imam Malik, al-Hakim, al-Baihaqi, Ibn Nashr & Ibn Hazm)

The Quran recognizes the diversity of races, nations, and ethnicities as part of Allah's creation. This diversity signifies His power and reflects Islam's acknowledgment of various languages, cultures, and traditions. Islam promotes pluralism to establish healthy partnerships among people. Through mutual understanding, one group's strengths can complement another's weaknesses, leading to societal harmony and national development (Rohana et al., 2017).

Seeking the Pleasure of Allah

Seeking Allah's pleasure (ridha Allah) is one of the noblest objectives in a Muslim's life. It reflects a deep sense of submission and a desire to earn divine acceptance. A believer should strive to fulfill Allah's commands and abstain from His prohibitions, as His pleasure guarantees true success in this world and the hereafter (Ayoup, 2019).

The Prophet (PBUH) said:

Whoever seeks the pleasure of Allah even if it displeases the people, Allah will suffice him against the people. And whoever seeks the pleasure of the people at the expense of displeasing Allah, Allah will leave him to the people. (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi)

This narration reminds believers that their priority should be to earn Allah's approval, rather than the approval of others. Human beings are weak and in constant need of divine protection. Pursuing worldly gain, such as power, status, or wealth, often leads individuals to compromise their values, thus incurring Allah's displeasure. Islam warns against such

tendencies and directs Muslims to uphold righteousness, even in the face of opposition.

In another Hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

Whoever incurs the wrath of Allah while seeking the pleasure of people, Allah will anger him and make those people displeased with him. But whoever seeks the pleasure of Allah, even if people are displeased with him, Allah will be pleased with him and will cause the people to be pleased with him as well. (Narrated by al-Tabrani)

This principle reinforces that proper integration in Islam must be grounded in sincerity and a constant effort to align one's intentions and actions with divine guidance.

The Importance of Integration in Islam

Racial and ethnic integration is crucial in fostering national development and social harmony. From the Islamic perspective, integration is a societal necessity and a divine command that aligns with justice, unity, and mutual respect. Among the key reasons why integration is important in Islam are the following:

Fulfilling the Human Need for Social Life

Islam emphasizes the essential nature of social interaction and community life. Humans are created to live in society, where they can form relationships, learn from one another, and work together for collective well-being. This is clearly illustrated in the Quran:

O mankind! Indeed, We have created you from male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. (Surah al-Hujurat: 13)

As cited by Sobian (2004), this verse affirms that knowing and cooperating with others, regardless of race or ethnicity, is a divine expectation and a foundation of social order in Islam.

A Foundation for Community Development

Harmonious inter-ethnic and inter-racial relations provide a stable foundation for societal progress. Integration facilitates the successful implementation of community development programmes, fostering participation and cooperation across all layers of society (Malaysia, n.d.). Such efforts would likely face resistance and inefficiency without mutual respect and understanding.

A Defence Against the Enemies of Islam

Unity among diverse communities strengthens a nation and deters external threats. The collective strength derived from integration is likened to a bundle of sticks—difficult to break when bound together, but easily snapped when separated. Such unity creates a formidable social fabric that intimidates adversaries and safeguards the sovereignty of the Muslim ummah.

Promoting Positive Thinking and Mutual Assistance

According to Hussin (2020), cultivating a positive mindset enhances one's ability to manage challenges. In a multi-ethnic society, openness to diversity leads to exchanging skills, experiences, and creativity. This synergy can accelerate national development by combining strengths from different cultural backgrounds.

Enhancing the Image of Islam and Reflecting the Perfection of Faith

Integration not only benefits society but also reflects actual Islamic values. A Muslim with complete faith strives to obey Allah's commands and follow the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) example. Such a person promotes justice, upholds truth, and contributes positively to society. The presence of such individuals enhances the image of Islam as a religion of peace, unity, and compassion.

Effects of Neglecting Integration

Neglecting the value of integration as prescribed in Islam can lead to serious consequences for individuals, communities, and the broader ummah. When unity is overlooked, Muslims become vulnerable to both internal discord and external threats. The following are some of the significant effects of neglecting integration:

Vulnerability to Oppression and Colonization

A divided ummah becomes weak and susceptible to external manipulation and control. Throughout history, disunity among Muslims has often led to the collapse of great Islamic civilizations. Enemies of Islam continuously seek opportunities to exploit internal divisions and impose dominance. As long as unity remains weak and Muslims are embroiled in internal conflicts, their strength and sovereignty will continue to diminish.

Tarnishing the Image of Islam

Division and conflict among Muslims portray a negative image of Islam to the world. Islam is a religion that emphasizes unity, brotherhood, and cooperation. According to Afifi (2020), Islam explicitly prohibits enmity and disconnection between individuals and instead commands kindness, justice, and preventing evil. Therefore, division contradicts Islamic teachings and projects an image of disorganization and weakness, which is contrary to the true spirit of Islam.

Invoking Allah's Wrath and Losing His Mercy

Allah has created mankind to worship Him through obedience to His commands and avoidance of His prohibitions. Serun Suci (2016) notes that failing to uphold Islamic values, including the obligation to maintain unity, leads to divine displeasure. When Muslims neglect integration and harmony, they risk losing Allah's mercy and exposing themselves to His wrath.

Diminishing the Perfection of Faith

Integration is closely related to the strength of one's faith. A believer's faith is perfected through adherence to Allah's commandments, including fostering harmonious relations with Muslims and non-Muslims. Conversely, neglecting these obligations weakens the believer's spiritual

state and reduces the quality of faith, which fluctuates depending on one's commitment to righteous actions.

Hindering the Progress of the Ummah and Nation

Selfishness and disunity not only impair the development of Muslim civilization but also hinder national progress. Muhammad (n.d.) emphasizes that all divine laws are perfect and designed to ensure human well-being. A prosperous society requires mutual support and cooperation. Without integration, the nation's potential for growth and collective prosperity is severely compromised.

Steps to Foster Integration of the Ummah

Fostering unity among Muslims is a central objective in Islam and is vital for individual well-being and societal stability. The integration of the ummah strengthens communal bonds and fortifies the Muslim world against internal division and external threats. The following steps are essential in promoting and sustaining integration within the ummah:

Returning to the Teachings of Islam

Islam provides a comprehensive and just framework for human life, promoting noble values, mutual assistance, and creating a harmonious society. It encompasses the relationship between humans and their Creator, and among fellow human beings. According to Harjin (2006), Islam encourages its followers to develop social bonds and recognize each other, thus laying a strong foundation for unity and cooperation.

Avoiding the Causes of Conflict

Peace is a fundamental principle in Islamic teachings and a dominant theme in the Quran. Islam does not condone conflict based on religious differences; instead, it opposes hostility and injustice. Kadir (2017) emphasizes that Islam only permits confrontation in response to tyranny or oppression. Therefore, avoiding the roots of conflict—such as prejudice, arrogance, and miscommunication—is essential in preserving unity.

Valuing the Principle of Unity

Unity is not only a social ideal in Islam but a religious obligation. As Ismail, Hassan, and Zakaria (n.d.) stated, Islam's straightforward and inclusive approach to life has made it a powerful unifying force. In today's context, unity signifies racial harmony and national solidarity, which must be upheld by all members of society regardless of status, ethnicity, or faith. Despite internal and external challenges, unity remains a principle worth striving for (Madzlan, 2020).

Practicing Shura (Consultation)

Shura, or mutual consultation, is a key Islamic practice that promotes inclusive decision-making. It prevents authoritarianism by encouraging individuals to seek the opinions of others, especially in matters of public concern. Through shura, differing perspectives are acknowledged, leading to more comprehensive and just solutions. The Quran is a guide to ensure fairness and balance during national and social affairs deliberation.

Strengthening the Relationship Between Scholars and Rulers (Ulama and Umara)

A strong and harmonious relationship between religious scholars (ulama) and state leaders (umara) is vital for the nation's well-being. Bakar (2019) states that cooperation between these entities contributes to spiritual and socio-political development. When scholars provide religious guidance and the government ensures effective governance, integrating the ummah can be meaningfully achieved through a balanced and unified leadership.

Conclusion

Islam firmly rejects all forms of discrimination and injustice that differentiate individuals based on gender, skin color, language, lineage, nationality, social status, religion, or wealth. While Islam offers certain flexibilities in engaging with non-Muslims, it prioritizes the welfare and protection of Muslims. This preferential treatment is not intended as an act of injustice towards non-Muslims, but rather as a means of safeguarding the sanctity of Islam and the well-being of its followers. This reflects Islam's deep commitment to justice and equality, while upholding the dignity of the faith.

Throughout this discussion, it is evident that Islam promotes a universal concept of human dignity that transcends racial, ethnic, and national boundaries. The accurate measure of honour in Islam is not determined by one's race, lineage, or tribe, but by one's piety and closeness to Allah. All segments of society must internalize this understanding to foster genuine integration and unity among diverse communities. Furthermore, Islam encourages the acceptance of religious and cultural differences as a natural part of human existence, advocating for tolerance and condemning attitudes such as prejudice, racism, fanaticism, ethnocentrism, and discrimination.

Unity and integration cannot be achieved without cooperation and commitment. Therefore, Muslims must draw inspiration from the prophetic model of unity exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who successfully established a cohesive and inclusive society based on mutual respect, justice, and shared purpose. The principles and strategies he employed serve as a timeless guide for building a prosperous, peaceful, and unified nation, embodied in the Quranic expression: "*Baldatun Ṭayyibatun wa Rabbun Ghafūr*" (A Good Land and a Forgiving God).

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