

From Ukhuwwah (brotherhood) to Ummah (community): Prophetic Blueprint for Social Inclusiveness.

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Abstract

The concept of Ummat-e Wahida holds a central place in Islamic tradition, representing the religion's universal nature. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his companions (Sahaba) cultivated this ideal community, designed to embrace and integrate diverse social and cultural identities. By honoring the unique socio-cultural differences across regions, Ummat-e Wahida presents a framework for religious unity. Rooted in the teachings of the Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Hadith), this concept forms the foundation of the Muslim community. This research delves into Prophet Muhammad's transformative leadership in Madeenah, particularly his efforts in transitioning from Ukhuwwah (brotherhood) to the establishment of a unified Ummah (community). By analyzing his methods for uniting the various tribal, ethnic, and religious groups of Madinah, the study emphasizes his inclusive approach to social cohesion. The Constitution of Madeenah, which fostered cooperation, religious tolerance, and shared responsibility, serves as a prominent example of this model, illustrating how unity was achieved amidst diversity. Through the Prophetic framework, the research reveals enduring principles of inclusiveness, justice, and community-building, which continue to be relevant in today's multicultural societies. Prophet Muhammad's vision offers a timeless guide for promoting peaceful coexistence and unity in a pluralistic world.

Key words: Ukhuwwah, Ummah, Social Inclusiveness, Muslim societies.

Introduction

From time immemorial, community feelings have been perceived as a major factor in the origin and development of civilizations, contributing to the construction of humanity and coexistence. Community bonds bring universal recognition and acceptance within society. This concept reflects the deep vision of religion before the world. From a sociological perspec-

tive, most religiously-based social organizations share key characteristics such as social homogeneity, moral cohesion, common religious sentiments, and strong primordial and organic ties. The Islamic concept of Ummat-e Wahida is widely recognized as embodying the characteristics of a community-based social institution. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) introduced this concept to preserve the distinctiveness of his community from other religious and non-religious groups.

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity, with over one billion followers, constituting about 25 percent of the global population according to the 2001 census. Of this population, around 1.1 billion live in 45 Muslim-majority countries, while the remaining 400 million live as minorities in 149 non-Islamic countries. According to Muslim belief, Islam is a divinely revealed religion, originating with Adam, the first prophet and the father of humanity, and culminating with the prophethood of Muhammad. Tawhid⁴² (the oneness of God) is the ultimate principle, and the Quran and Hadith are the two primary sources for understanding the religion.

The Quranic verses convey that Islam is a universal, inclusive, diverse, and pluralistic religion. The philosophy of Islam begins with God and continues through the inevitable journey of all people returning to their Creator. The concept of Ummah holds great significance in Islamic tradition, symbolizing the universality of the religion. While acknowledging and celebrating the socio-cultural diversity of various regions, this concept provides a framework for religious unity. The entire notion of the Muslim Ummah is based on the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Hadith). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) aimed to establish this ideal society as an exemplary model (uswat al-hasana), serving as a notable example for others to follow.

From brotherhood to community feeling.

Before the Hijra (migration to Madina), Muslims lived in Makkah under the rule of the Quraysh tribe, who were non-Muslims. The Hijra marked a pivotal moment: upon arriving in Madina, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) transformed the city both mentally and socially. The Muhajirun (migrants) and the Ansar (helpers) lived together as natural brothers, sharing their homes, families, wealth, and even, on some occasions, inheritance. To build this foundation, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) initially employed the concept of Ukhuwwah (brotherhood), which gradually

evolved into a broader sense of community. By fostering a deep sense of

belonging and a shared destiny, he guided the people of Madina to move beyond individual tribal affiliations and adopt a more inclusive identity as part of the Ummah. This transformation laid the groundwork for a unified and resilient Islamic community, marked by solidarity and collective responsibility.

Ummah: The Islamic Model of an Ideal Society

From a sociological perspective, the concept of the Islamic ideal society has undergone significant transformations. Initially, it was centered around a few Arab tribes, which later evolved into the Arab Muslim community. As Islam spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula and gained acceptance among non-Arabs, the concept of Ummah expanded as well, encompassing all Muslims into a unified community of believers (Denny, 1975; Rahman, 1984; Watt, 1955). Riaz Hassan notes that the Ummah, as a sociological concept, can be understood from two main perspectives: as a “community” and as a “collective identity⁴⁴.” Essentially, Ummah refers to the global Muslim community. The word itself is Arabic and represents a supranational community with a shared history that transcends national, regional, and ethnic boundaries. However, defining the Ummah is complex due to its connection with multiple and diverse realities.

In a broad sense, the Ummah includes Jews, Christians, and other religious groups, as well as the Muslim community, followers of Prophet Muhammad. In another interpretation, it refers to all peoples who have had prophets sent to them. However, in its exclusive sense, the Globalisation’s Challenges to the Islamic “Ummah”. Riaz Hassan.

Ummah refers only to Muslims, the followers of Prophet Muhammad. The term originates from Ummat-e Wahida, a Qur’anic concept. Surah Aal-Imran, Chapter 110 states: “You are the best people (Ummah) raised for the good of mankind; you enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil and believe in Allah.⁴⁵” This term appears approximately sixty-four times in the Quran.

Numerous studies and scholarly interpretations of the term Ummah in the Quran suggest that it signifies a group of people to whom God has sent a prophet, or a people who are part of a divine plan of salvation. These studies assert that the term Ummah refers to a single group united by common religious beliefs. More than sixty-five verses in the Quran mention the term Ummah. For instance, in Surah Al-Nahl, it is stated: “And We did raise among every people a messenger⁴⁶.” Similarly, in Surah Fatir, it says: “and there is no person to whom a Warner has not been

sent47.” In Surah Al-An’am, while discussing those who insult Islam, Allah advises not to revile the faith of others, as their lack of understanding may lead them to insult Allah. It states: “Thus unto every people have we caused their doing to seem fair, then to their Lord is their return, and He shall announce to them what they have been doing.” In these verses, the term Ummah is used to denote a community. Importantly, the term is not limited to the Muslim Ummah, but also refers to non-believers. This broader usage indicates that the Quran applies Ummah in various contexts, prompting a deeper exploration of its different meanings as used throughout the text.

In several instances, Ummah refers to an undefined or broad group of people. For example, in the story of Prophet Musa, Surah Al-Qasas says, “And when he arrived at the water of Madyan, he found there a group of men (ummah min al-nas), watering their flocks48.” The term can also signify a specific religion or the beliefs of a particular group, as in Surah Al-Zukhruf, which states: “Nay, they say, ‘We found our fathers following a certain course, and we are guided by their footsteps49.’” In some contexts, Ummah may denote an example or model of faith, such as when Prophet Ibrahim is described as an Ummah devoted to God. Surah Al-Nahl says: “Ibrahim was indeed a paragon of virtue, devoted to Allah, ever inclined to Him, and he was not among those who associate others with God50.” Additionally, the term can refer to the followers of prophets, as in Surah Yunus: “And for every people, there is a Messenger51.” These examples highlight the diverse meanings and applications of the term Ummah. Islamic scholars use the term in various ways to address different circumstances and interpretations.

The Global Ummah in the New World Order

Social inclusion can be understood as both a process and a goal. As a process, it aims to enhance the participation of individuals who have been marginalized due to factors such as gender, age, religion, disability, ethnicity, birthplace, or other socio-economic reasons. By providing greater access to resources, opportunities, and the ability to voice their rights, disadvantaged groups can experience increased inclusiveness. The World Bank defines social inclusion as the “process of improving the terms for individuals and groups to take part in society” and “the process of enhancing the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged by their circumstances, to participate in society52.” In essence, inclusion revolves around the fair distribution of opportunities and access to participate. When considering the Islamic concept of Ummat-e Wahida, which addresses the welfare and unity of all Muslims, it also presents a model

of inclusion. This raises questions about how inclusion is addressed in Islam, what sources of knowledge inform this concept, and how relevant and applicable these sixth-century principles are in today's globalized world.

The basic principles of Islam, encompassing both articles of faith and articles of worship, highlight the significance and reach of the concept of Ummah in Islam. The three core principles of faith—Tauhid, Risalat, and Aqirah—directly and indirectly promote the universality of the Ummah. Tauhid emphasizes the oneness of God, asserting that there is no partner to Him. His power is the ultimate reality, with nothing able to alter or control His will. Surah Iqlas in the Quran clearly defines the foundational concept of Tauhid. Risalat serves as the connection between humanity and God, focusing on divine revelation, which is seen as God's guidance for humanity in this life and the hereafter. Belief in messengers, books, and angels is integral to the concept of revelation. Together, Tauhid, Risalat, and Aqirah unite the Ummah.

In the articles of worship, the universality of Islam and the concept of Ummah are also emphasized. For example, in Namaz (prayer), the uniformity begins from the very start, as discussed by Shaikh Zainuddin Makhdoom in Fath al-Mu'in, where he describes how people should stand in line during communal prayer. Namaz transcends all boundaries, symbolizing equality. Similarly, Sawm (fasting) and Zakat (charity) focus on fostering socio-economic equality and social welfare. These acts of worship encourage empathy for the less fortunate, and Zakat serves as a solution to bridge economic disparities. Hajj is the ultimate representation of the global Ummah, where Muslims from around the world gather in one place, free from divisions based on class, caste, or regionalism. During Hajj, all participants come together with a single purpose, worshipping Allah at the holy sites of Makkah and Medina, demonstrating the unity of the global Islamic Ummah.

Another aspect to consider is the relevance of Ummat-e Wahida in today's globalized world. Globalization refers to the increasing integration of economies, societies, cultures, and policies worldwide. While primarily viewed as an economic process, globalization also involves the movement of goods, services, and capital across borders. Initially driven by economic factors, globalization has since expanded into various other areas, including the exchange of ideas and global perspectives, contributing to greater interconnectedness between nations. Economic growth and international trade have benefited many countries. This raises the ques-

tion of the re-emergence of the Muslim Ummah in today's world. Various movements have emerged in different parts of the world advocating for Islamic political structures. The earlier-mentioned idea of "religious community-based social organization" is evident in these movements. Muslims around the world are united by social homogeneity, moral cohesion, shared religious sentiments, and organic ties, which help strengthen the global Ummah and promote social inclusion.

In his work *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Shahab Ahmed offers a notable critique of the global Ummah. Using the example of the region spanning from the Balkans to Bengal, Ahmed observes that Islamic Sharia has not been uniform across different societies. Instead, Islam has adapted to various socio-cultural contexts, making it more accessible and inclusive. As a result, there are multiple forms of Islam rather than a single, monolithic version. While the concept of the global Ummah remains foundational, Muslim societies around the world display different socio-cultural expressions of their faith.

Conclusion

Islam provides a comprehensive way of life and offers solutions to the challenges faced by the Muslim Ummah both now and in the future. It is essential to cultivate leaders from within the Muslim world who can guide the Ummah not only spiritually but also in all aspects of life, including socio-economic and political spheres. While differences within the Ummah are acknowledged, these variations generally pertain to specific issues rather than fundamental principles. The universality of Islam encompasses inclusiveness, allowing it to embrace and protect diversity. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) exemplified how to live as a Muslim and maintain the unity of the Ummah, both in thought and in practice. Sayyid Quthub highlights

two ways to uphold this unity: through a purified consciousness among Muslims and through the intervention of Muslim leaders with appropriate legislative measures. Ultimately, it is the scholarly duty to preserve the global Islamic brotherhood, following the example set by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the ideal path to living according to Islamic principles.

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