

What is the Islamic Society?

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Abstract

The Holy Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) concerned about Muslim and Islamic society. In many ways these holy books focuses on the importance of Islamic society. Because Allah and his prophet believes that Muslims *Ummah* are the best among all Adam's generation. Consequently, Islamic religion takes them out from the darkness into the light in order to achieve happiness, felicity in this world and the Hereafter. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to find out the answers for what is the Islamic society in order to save human beings and strengthen our Islamic society so that Muslim *Ummah* will remain the best forever.

Keywords: Islamic society, Religion, Social Change, Sociology, Islam.

1. Introduction

What is the Islamic society? This is critical question need to be answered. Western people are very keen to know what the Islamic society is. Before we answer this question, it is important to know the definition of society in general. Society is defined as "a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behavior and of liberties" (Maciver and Charles, 1999). Simply, it is defined as "a group of interacting people in a defined territory and shared culture" (Renzetti and Curran, 2000). It is the web of social relationships that is always changing. Social relationship means the relationship that is determined by mutual awareness. This mutual recognition of relationship is not enough for the existence of the society (Maciver and Charles, 1999; Al-Zain, 1998)

Some theorists have limited and based the societal factors as those, which emphasize economic and political ties; therefore, they have defined society as "a number of population that shares the same territory and is bound together by economic and political ties"

(Brinkerhoff et. al., 1991). This definition has limited the relationships between people to economic and political ties, whereas there are other ties such as doctrinal and behavioral unity, faith and so on. These ideas cannot be applied in our discussion and explanation of the concept of the Islamic society for two reasons. The first is that because the individuals in the Islamic society are bound by more than the material ties. Mohammad Muslehuddin, for example, has defined the Islamic society as “an association formed according to Divine Law, for the purpose of harmonious and peaceful coexistence” (Mohammed Muslehuddin, 1977). Other scholars have used the term *Ummah* rather than the term Islamic society. They quote this term from the Holy *Qur’ān*. In it, the terms *Ummah* and village (*qarāyah*) have been used to refer to society (Moāammad ‘Abd al-Jabār 1987). Allah (s.w.t) said:

يَلِكْ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا

يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤١﴾

“That is a nation which has passed on. It will have [the consequence of] what it earned and you will have what you have earned. And you will not be asked about what they used to do” (2:141).

ذَلِكَ أَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ رَبُّكَ مُهْلِكَ الْقُرَىٰ بِظُلْمٍ وَأَهْلُهَا غَافِلُونَ ﴿١٣١﴾

“That is because your Lord would not destroy the cities for wrongdoing while their people were unaware” (6:131).

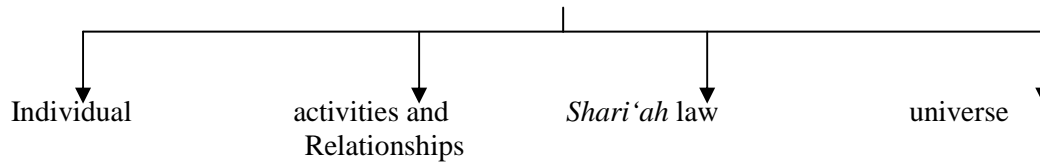
Ali Shari‘ati (1979), for example, has defined a Muslim society or *Ummah* as “a number of people, or individuals, possessing a common faith and goal, who come together in harmony with the intention of advancing and moving toward their common goal”. Similarly, Al-Faruqi (1998) has used the term *Ummah* to refer to the society in Islam. He defined the *Ummah* as “a universal society whose membership includes the widest possible variety of ethnicities or communities, but whose commitment to Islam binds them to a specific social order”. This shows that faith and Divine Law bind the individuals, Muslims, and these are the cardinal features of an Islamic society.

The other reason is that in the Islamic society, the geographical boundaries are not recognized, as Rosser-Owen has explained. According to him, “the Islamic society does not recognize any territory. It can be operated at the local community level as in the case of *Jamā‘ah* of a mosque or it can be the *Ummah* as a whole. To characterize a society as an Islamic one, he said, it should fully practice *Shari‘ah* laws” (Dawud Rosser-Owen, 1975). Indeed, Isma’il al-Faruqi has asserted the same idea thirteen years later. He said that the *Ummah*, or Islamic society, is “not determined at all by geographic considerations. Its territory is not only the whole earth, but all of creation” (Al-Faruqi, 1998).

Hence, based on the above information, we have chosen to identify the Islamic society differently. In my own view, an Islamic society can be simply defined as consisting of a number of people in every place and at every time who are united by Islamic belief and Divine Law, which regulate their relationships and their activities for the continuity and improvement of the society. This definition includes non-Muslims with all their rights, duties and obligations under an Islamic state.

2. Components of Islamic Society

Based on the above definition, we have chosen four elements that constitute the Islamic society. The following diagram shows the basic elements of an Islamic society:

Diagram 1**Elements of Islamic society**

The first element is people or individuals, they are essential for the existence of a society (Mohammed Muslehuddin, 1977). If there were no individuals, society would not exist. When we say individuals, we mean all people without regards to their cultural and physical differences, status, races, ethnicities, and their sex. Though Islam has recognized the existence of these differences among human beings and has appreciated the way they help and support the unity of religion, it does not imply any values in themselves (Al-Faruqi, 1998). What Islam evaluates is only what is within the heart and soul of human beings. In other words, Islam concerns itself with the piety of human beings. This includes both the pious intention and pious work.

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَنُكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

“O mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted” (49:13).

Abu Hurairah (R.A) reported that the Prophet said:

Allāh looks not to your figures, nor to your wealth, but He looks to your hearts and deeds. (Muslim) (Fazlul Karim, 1994).

Fathi Othman, in his interpretation of the above verse, has said that the objective of creating human beings with different races, sex, physical, linguistic and cultural characteristic is “to develop universal knowledge, recognition and cooperation with one another and complementation not isolation or conflict. So that people can benefit from such richness and variety” (Fathi Osman (1997). These people are from the universe and they are found at any time anywhere.

إِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ



“Indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me” (21:92).

This shows that the Islamic society is a universal society. It is found at every place, in East and West, in south and north, and found at all time (Al-Faruqi, 1998). It was not only found at the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), but also before his time, and at the time of other Messengers from Adam to Jesus (peace be upon them all), and after their time. And it is certain that it will exist also until the end of the world. In other words, the Islamic society has existed from the first day human beings appeared on Earth and it will last until the end of life in this world. Allāh said:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ

الْعَفُورُ ﴿٢﴾

“[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed – and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving” (67:2).

﴿ وَسَارِعُوا إِلَى مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ

أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

“And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous” (3:133)

This action, in Islam, is of two types. One is known as worship (*Ibāda*) and the other is known as dealing, interacting or living (*Mu‘amallāt*) with human beings on the basis of *Husn-al-Akhlāq*.

First, worship. It is that action through which “Muslims draw near to their Lord and show trust in Him by their observance of His divine rules” (Fathi Osman, 1997). Worship of God is made up of five principles as it is stated in the *Āadith* (Morgan, 1958.).

Islam has been built on five [pillars]: testifying that there is no god but Allāh and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh , performing the prayers, paying the *zakat*, making the pilgrimage to the House of *kabah*, and fasting in Ramadan (Bukhari and Muslim) (An-Nawawi, 1982).

The scope of worship is not limited to the performance of prayer “*Salāt*”, fasting and other foundations of Islam, but it includes every deed that is performed within the Islamic *Shari‘ah* to seek the pleasure of Allāh (An-Nawawi, 1982; Afzalur Rahman, 1980; Fathi Osman, 1997; Al-Faruqi, 1998). Abu Hurairah (RA) narrates that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

Each person’s every joint must perform a charity every day the sun comes up: to act justly between two people is a charity; to help a man with his belongings onto it is a charity; a good word is a charity; every step you take to prayers is a charity; and removing a harmful thing from the road is a charity (Bukhari and Muslim) (An-Nawawi, 1982).

This shows that these worships can be performed and practiced “at any time and in any form” (Fathi Osman, 1997). These forms of worship not only strengthen the relationship between human beings and God, but they also develop their morality and ethical behavior (Fathi Osman, 1997). Besides, they connect human beings with their fellow beings.

The other type of action, which is transactional dealings, refer to the actions that “Muslims uphold their interests and repel evils in themselves, between themselves and their neighbors, and between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the actions which preserve rights, fulfill the general good and establish peace and security” (Morgan, 1958.). In other words, dealings include those actions, which relate people to one another such as in economic activities.

However, in the Holy *Qur‘ān*, the term “good deeds” is used to refer to both types of action, worship and intractional dealings, and it is always connected with the faith or “*Imān*”. This shows that *Imān* and *‘Amal* cannot be separated. There is no *Imān* if it is not followed by action or deed (Nabāl al-Samālâtá, 1988; Anwar al-Jundá, 1987; Afzalur Rahman, 1980). Allāh says:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ



“Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience” (103:3).

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

Belief has got seventy and odd branches of which the best is the saying- There is no deity but Allāh, and of which the most insignificant is the removal of injurious things from pathway, and shame is a branches of faith (Fazlul Karim, 1994).

If we take Zakat as example, we find that it is one of the foundations of Islam. All these actions with the relationships they create are regulated and controlled by certain moral rules and laws that are known in Islam as *Sharā'ah*. The objective of these laws is to spread justice all over the world while the moral rules aim “to rise to an appropriate standard and attain the level of the more advanced social classes” (Morgan, 1958.).

These are the main components of the Islamic society. Further we can analyze to see the basic characteristics of an Islamic society.

The first and the foremost feature is that it is an Islamic and *Tawhidic* society. This feature makes it different from other societies, such as capitalistic and socialistic. It is Islamic and *Tawhidic* in the sense that its existence is based on the submission to one God and conformation to His *Shari'ah* laws as guidance for the continuation of this society. “It is the *Tawhid* and its *Shari'ah* that form this society, but not the society that made the *Shari'ah*” (Sayyid Quab, 1988).

Second feature is that it is a universal society and subscribes to universal norms and values. It is for all human beings without exception. It is not for particular groups. It consists of people with different ethnicity, color, language, culture and, different religious groups. This feature constitutes the unity of *Ummah* in diversity. This denotes the equality of all people in the sight of God. All of them, as vicegerents of God, have the same right to enjoy the entire God given resources and gifts in this world (Ali Shari'ati, 1979).

Another characteristic is that the Islamic society is humanistic in nature. It is so in the sense that it realizes the worth and total dignity of human beings. “They are regarded as the crown of creations.” (Al-Faruqi, 1998). It professes and acknowledges the capacity of human beings, their needs and instincts. Under the influence of this society, human beings rest, spend their wealth, and practice their religion, because it is the responsibility of the Islamic society to protect them and their freedom and insure their rights (Ali Shari'ati, 1979).

Another remarkable feature of Islamic society is that it is a dynamic society. The Islamic society, like other societies, is subject to change. But its change is different from other societies in the sense that it changes according to what Islam proposes and opposes. However, Islam proposes not only to change the individual and society spiritually and morally, but also materially, physically, psychologically, and intellectually. Its main aim from social change is to save human beings and take them out from the darkness into the light in order to achieve happiness, felicity in this world and the Hereafter.

3. Conclusions

Allah (s.w.t) created man in different places, with different color and different culture. The only thing that can unite this verity of men is their religious and believes. Islam is the religion of Allah that bonds together its community. The Muslim society as highlighted in the above discussion, consist of a number of people in every place and at every time who are united by Islamic belief and Divine Law, which regulate their relationships and their activities for the

continuity and improvement of the society. Muslims crowned with beautiful characteristics that take them out from the darkness into the light in order to achieve happiness, felicity in this world and the Hereafter.

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