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The Concept of ‘Ummah’ in the Qur’ān: Transcending Race, Tribe, and Ethnicity

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines how the Qur’ānic concept of “Ummah” changes present-day barriers based on race, tribal and ethnic boundaries. The study analyzes how the Qur’ān outlines an Ummah which unites believers through common faith as well as moral practices and justice-focused dedication but excludes ethnic or tribal classifications. The analysis of essential verses shows that the Ummah embraces believers who are equal without any distinctions based on their social status or ethnicity. The article uses Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) guidance to explain that the Qur’ān establishes a worldwide community through its emphasis on equal respect, compassion and solidarity between all people. The research demonstrates the meaningfulness of this doctrine to present-day society by showing how the Qur’ān’s model of unity helps tackle current social divisions, discrimination and unequal treatment. The article resolves in support of building a global Ummah that promotes both social justice and worldwide peace.

Keywords: Diversity, Equality, Faith, Inclusion, Qur’ān, Ummah, Unity

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Introduction

Throughout human history, racial, tribal and ethnic conflicts have generated widespread societal oppression and created conflicts that produce injustices. Human rights developments during recent times have not managed to eliminate racist structures from Pakistan and other Muslim-populated nations where these destructive systems still exist. Through the Qur'ānic revelation, Muslim believers gain access to an enduring concept of human connectivity that goes above superficial differences between races, tribal groups and ethnicities. Through the framework of Ummah, the Qur'ān creates a novel ethical system that determines brotherhood based on both faith and moral alignment instead of blood relations or geographical origins. The article establishes that Ummah in the Qur'ān presents a formidable challenge against every form of ethnic and racial prejudice because it defines humanity through God-consciousness instead of biological ties or physical appearance. Humanity shares a single origin according to the Qur'ān, as the scripture identifies this truth as a main theological message. Through the verse in Sūrat al-Nisā', "*O mankind, fear your Lord who created you from one soul (nafs wāhidah) and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women*",¹ the Qur'ān clearly states that every individual from all racial backgrounds stems from a single origin. The theological meaning behind this verse becomes clear according to al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) because he argues that all humans possess equal value and dignity throughout all creation.² The Qur'ān bestows inherent honor upon all human beings by stating, "*We have certainly honored the children of Adam*",³ which establishes universal human dignity that never succumbs to societal divisions.

Human diversity finds a positive celebration within the pages of the Qur'ān because the text affirms absolute equality between all human beings in origin. The Qur'ān introduces the sign of human creation with references to both heaven and earth and human speech patterns and skin tones through Surah al-Rūm, as it states: "*And among His signs is the creation of the*

¹ Qur'ān 4:1

² al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2001), v. 5, p. 2.

³ Qur'ān 17:70

heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors”.¹ By designating linguistic and racial and ethnic differences as origins from God the Qur’ān showcases the absence of defects in human diversity which rejects discrimination. Al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) in his work *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* presents this verse as a call for believing individuals to examine the artistic and wise elements of human diversity instead of permitting these attributes to lead them toward divisions.² Tribalism (*‘aṣabiyyah*) receives its strongest confrontation in the Qur’ān through Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, where it states: “*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 (atqākum)*”.³ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) states that the verse abolishes previous tribal order through its declaration of moral superiority surpassing genetic connections.⁴ Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) delivered the important instruction about tribalism during his final public address at *‘Arafāt*, declaring unequivocally: “No Arab has superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have superiority over an Arab; a white person has no superiority over a black person, nor does a black person have superiority over a white person, except by righteousness and good deeds”.⁵ According to Qur’ān, Muslims must form a spiritual, moral community (*Ummah*) beyond traditional distinctions of race, tribe and ethnic background. Through the divine revelation, Allah declared: “*You are the best Ummah produced for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah*”.⁶ Al-Shahrastānī writes in his book *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* that *Ummah* represents a specific Qur’ānic strategy to

¹ Qur’ān 30:22

² al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001), v. 25, p. 120.

³ Qur’ān 49:13

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1999), v. 4, p. 211.

⁵ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1999), v. 5, p. 411, ḥadīth no. 23489.

⁶ Qur’ān 3:110

develop ethical universality beyond common tribal bonds.¹ A moral requirement of the Ummah stands against all prejudices which divide the community on racial or ethnic lines. Accuracy and moral value of tawhīd (the Oneness of Allah) require us to reject viewing certain races or ethnicities as superior, since this practice violates divine principles. The belief that ascriptive identity gives superiority goes against divine wisdom since Allah created all humanity and serves as the only true source of creation. According to al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), pride, originating from ancestry, displays ignorant and soulless religious misconceptions.² Muslims must make the elimination of racial and ethnic bigotry a fundamental religious duty because it stems directly from Qur'anic values.

People need the Qur'anic model of Ummah as an alternative vision which brings divine justice and universal dignity to an increasingly globalized yet fragmented world. The Pakistani society needs to restore the Qur'anic model of fraternity because racial tensions threaten to reduce national harmony. Islamic scholars, alongside educators, must fulfill their deep duty to revive the divine model of Ummah mentioned in the Qur'ān because this effort safeguards the true identity of Muslims grounded in Allah's ethical teachings.

The Creation of Humanity: Common Origin and Dignity

Islamic teachings demonstrate that all humans derive from a single origin, establishing the basis for universal human worth. The Qur'ān affirms: “*O mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul (nafs wāḥida), and from it created its mate, and from the two of them spread countless men and women*”.³ This verse establishes human creation as ontological which represents biological origins yet recognizes universal equality and human interconnectedness and grants intrinsic honor to every person. By traditional Islamic interpretation of the Qur'ān as explained by Ibn Kathir and others, “nafs wāḥida” points to Adam because he is the patriarchal source of Eve and all of humankind.⁴ Muslim theology confirms

¹ Al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm. *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1992), v. 1, p. 24.

² al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 2004), v. 3, p. 384.

³ Qur'ān 4:1

⁴ Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* v. 1, p. 482.

the common ancestry of all humanity through several theological perspectives. Al-Raghib al-Isfahani describes through his work *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān* that the Qur’ān uses “*insān*” (human) to refer to beings that show social qualities and reciprocal recognition because they stem from the same origin.¹ Modern Islamic scholar Wahbah al-Zuhayli emphasizes that human dignity (*karāmah*) stems naturally from being a “creature of God” (*makhlūq lillāh*) because race, wealth and power do not determine this dignity.² A sacred human dignity exists continuously for all beings across the world. From a comparative theological perspective, the Islamic assertion of a common origin parallels the Biblical view.³ The Islamic doctrine bases human dignity both on creation and the trust (*amānah*) which has been bestowed upon humanity.⁴ Islamic theologian Fakhr al-Din al-Razi interprets how accepting this *amānah* positions mortals above other creatures who shunned it.⁵ Human dignity exists as a divine charge that necessitates ethical and social duties from humanity. The Qur’ān explicitly declares: “*And We have certainly honored the children of Adam*”.⁶ Al-Qurtubi understands the verse to establish universal honor which embraces humanity regardless of religious affiliation.⁷ The Qur’ān introduces a radical reform compared to pre-existent sociopolitical rankings that existed at its revelation. Islamic civilization throughout history acknowledged non-Muslim dhimmī citizens as individuals with irrevocable

¹ al-Isfahani, Al-Raghib. *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 2005), p. 92.

² al-Zuhayli, Wahbah. *Tafsīr al-Munīr fī al-‘Aqīda wa-al-Sharī‘a wa-al-Manhaj* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1998), 2:45

³ Genesis 1:27

⁴ Qur’ān 33:72

⁵ al-Rāzī. *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, v. 24, p. 140.

⁶ Qur’ān 17:70

⁷ al-Qurtubī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2006), v. 10, p. 225.

rights established through their fundamental human dignity.¹ Islamic sources apply dignity as an active measure for performing ethical action beyond mere existence. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reiterated the value of human beings, declaring in his Farewell Sermon: “O people, your Lord is One, and your father is one. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab...”² The profound phrase underwent institutional transformation into Islamic legal fiqh that established moral principles for treating diverse peoples with justice and equality.³ In his philosophical work, Mulla Sadra presents substantial motion (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*) which shows human beings derive from shared essence yet their spiritual development continues thus reflecting shared potential for perfection and nobility.⁴ The Islamic view of human dignity emerges from a progressive perspective which demonstrates humans have a potential for spiritual elevation. According to Tariq Ramadan, Islamic teaching about humans belonging to a single family becomes essential for combating contemporary racism, along with nationalism and exclusionist policies.⁵ Through Qur’ānic affirmation, “*Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you*”,⁶ the present global obstacles of xenophobia and discrimination are eliminated by removing the baseless sense of racial superiority. In analytical terms, the Qur’ān teaches us about human origins, and this knowledge creates both environmental and social obligations for humanity. Since we are all part of one being, the suffering inflicted upon others through mistreatment extends to a direct harm of our own expanded identity. Islamic scholar Muhammad Iqbal delivered this interpretation in his lectures

¹ Abou El Fadl, Khaled. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), p. 102.

² Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. *Musnad Aḥmad*, h. 22978.

³ Kamali, M. Hashim. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2023), p. 244.

⁴ Mulla Sadra. *Al-Asfar al-Arba’a* (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 1981), v. 6, p. 13.

⁵ Ramadan, Tariq. *Islam and the Arab Awakening* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 66.

⁶ Qur’ān 49:13

through ethical universalism as he connected the origins of humanity.¹ Modern Arabic scholars involve *karāmat al-insān* discussions in human rights discourse as a primary scholarly evolution. Yusuf al-Qaradawi presents in his study *Ḥuqūq al-Insān fī al-Islām* that many modern human rights declarations preexist in Islamic teachings through divine commands rather than social agreements.²

The Islamic perspective about human equality starts from a shared origin and leads directly to the foundation of equitable societies. The current persistence of inequality requires people to actively re-establish their dedication to the Qur'ānic belief in shared humanity.

Aspect	Islamic View	Western Secular View
Origin of Humanity	Created by Allah from a single soul (Adam) ³	Evolutionary development through natural processes (Darwinian theory).
Basis of Human Dignity	Divine creation and responsibility (trust from God - <i>amānah</i>) ⁴	Rational capacity, autonomy, and human rights developed through social contracts.
Universality of Dignity	All humans are honored equally, ⁵ regardless of religion or race.	Universal declaration of human rights (post-World War II, 1948).
Criterion for Superiority	Only righteousness (<i>taqwa</i>) distinguishes people. ⁶	No inherent superiority; dignity upheld through equal citizenship and law.
Responsibility	Humans are trustees (<i>khulafā'</i>) on Earth. ⁷	Humans are responsible for ethical progress, often without religious reference.

¹ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 82.

² Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. *Ḥuqūq al-Insān fī al-Islām* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1998), p. 19.

³ Qur'ān 4:1

⁴ Qur'ān 33:72

⁵ Qur'ān 17:70

⁶ Qur'ān 49:13

⁷ Qur'ān 2:30

Moral Foundation	Based on divine guidance through revelation (Qur'ān and Sunnah).	Based on human reason, ethics, and philosophical traditions (e.g., Kantian ethics).
View of Human Nature	Humans are born pure (<i>fiṭrah</i>) but capable of both good and evil.	Humans are rational beings shaped by environment, education, and society.
Rights Source	God-given, unalienable rights linked to worship and stewardship.	Legally constructed rights dependent on social agreements and constitutions.

This table compares Islamic and Western secular perspectives on human origin and dignity. According to Islamic belief, Allah created humanity by refining one single soul into diverse forms while giving each person a natural dignity and moral accountability stemming from divine trust and righteousness. Western secular thought describes human dignity through rational capabilities alongside socially developed legal rights, although it does not need to mention divine origins. Human dignity has universal acceptance in both Islam and Western traditions, but Islam derives this value from spiritual principles, whereas Western traditions base it on independent human rights and legal systems. Through its theocentric foundation, Islam establishes a goal-driven method to preserve dignity that differs from the Western rights-based system, primarily based on human requirements.

Diversity as a Sign of Allah, Not a Basis for Superiority

The wide array of human expressions represents one of Allah's most significant divine declarations, which appears frequently in the Qur'ānic text because it demonstrates His creative power alongside wisdom and compassion. The Islamic perspective of diversity instead promotes a chance for human beings to appreciate Allah's greatness while building mutual understanding between individuals. The Qur'ān states, "*And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge*".¹ Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī highlight that this diversity points to the perfection of Allah's act of creation and the richness

¹ Qur'ān 30:22

of human experience.¹ The Islamic religion completely eliminates any concept that racial, ethnic, linguistic background, or tribal heritage would grant someone superiority. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) explicitly expressed this belief in his Farewell Sermon where he declared, “*An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have superiority over an Arab; a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have superiority over a white — except by righteousness and good deeds*”.² Muslims in this crucial statement actively rejected superiority claims from ancestry or bloodline despite strong tribal traditions among Arab communities. Studies in contemporary times establish that this teaching established an equitable social system within Muslim society.³

According to the Qur’ān, the main reason behind natural human diversity exists to promote ta’āraf, which signifies mutual understanding and recognition above all else, including rivalry or attempts at domination: “*O mankind! Indeed, We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you*”.⁴ This verse invalidates every form of racial pride while defining human excellence through piety (*taqwā*) according to Al-Rāzī.⁵ Islamic doctrine shows that human diversity exists naturally, while it functions as a key element to support the growth of cultures. Ibn Kathīr explains that Allah uses racial disparities together with linguistic and color-based differences as indications of His divine power and wisdom.⁶ The Qur’ānic depiction of humanity shows that any belief system that tries to devalue diversity stands against this spiritual vision. According to contemporary Islamic scholars, the interpretation of this principle remains powerfully significant for current times. According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Islam accepts societal pluralism as

¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, v. 21, p. 86.

² Ibn Hishām, ‘Abd al-Mālik. *Sīrat Ibn Hishām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001), v. 4, p. 273.

³ Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 133.

⁴ Qur’ān 49:13

⁵ al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, v. 30, p. 83.

⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, v. 3, p. 435.

a necessary divine command that shapes human social order.¹ According to his view, differences resulting from religion, culture, and ethnicity require peaceful dialogue for their resolution instead of forced consent or suppression.

Throughout Islamic history, practical examples have shown the practical application of this principle. The Madinan Muslim community established by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) maintained Jewish communities alongside other tribes according to the community foundation known as *Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīnah*. Dr. Montgomery Watt observes that Ottoman Muslims maintained varied populations through legal pluralism combined with mutual respect.² Islam treats diversity as an essential ethical principle that functions as a core component of Islamic life in practice. The Qur'ān and Hadith emphasize multiple times the need for honoring diversity and safeguarding justice and individual dignity. For example, Allah commands, “Do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just: that is nearer to piety”.³ The comparison between Islamic perspectives and those from Western secularism reveals conceptual overlaps, together with various points of divergence, which can be observed through the following table:

Aspect	Islamic Perspective	Western Secular Perspective
Origin of Diversity	Created intentionally by Allah as a sign of wisdom. ⁴	Result of natural historical and evolutionary processes.
Purpose of Diversity	To foster understanding (<i>ta'āruf</i>) and test righteousness. ⁵	Social development, cultural enrichment, sometimes conflict.
Value Standard	Based on piety (<i>taqwā</i>), not race or ethnicity.	Based on individual freedom and equality under law.

¹ al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. *Min Fiqh al-Dawlah fi al-Islām* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1997), p. 58.

² Watt, W. Montgomery. *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 221.

³ Qur'ān 5:8

⁴ Qur'ān 30:22

⁵ Qur'ān 49:13

Approach to Differences	Dialogue, peaceful coexistence, and justice.	Tolerance, multiculturalism, human rights discourse.
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Islamic teachings instruct Muslims to view human variations as divine work while preventing them from using these differences to establish superiority claims. Allah's creation of diversity should make humans both humble and grateful as they dedicate themselves to maintaining justice and building peaceful relations. Muslims can look to this timeless Qur'ānic blueprint to establish peace and justice in their society as tensions from ethnic, racial and religious differences fragment our globalized world.

Condemnation of Tribalism (‘Aṣabiyyah)

Islam completely bans ‘aṣabiyyah, which represents the complete loyalty people show toward their tribe or race when it leads to wronging justice or moral truth. Through a direct message, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) strongly condemned this malfunctioning mindset. Through a reliable hadith in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated that someone leaves the community if they advocate or combat or lose their life because of ‘aṣabiyyah’.¹ The teaching of Islam directs believers to place their loyalty beyond tribal affiliations or racial identities towards justice and the unified purpose of Muslims around the world. During the early stages of Islam, the Arabian population exhibited intense tribal behavior, which made tribal loyalty exceed every other form of connection. Ibn Khaldūn describes in his Muqaddimah that ‘aṣabiyyah provided pre-Islamic Arabs with their core social organizational framework.² Through its framework, Islam created a system of brotherhood that extends beyond family genetics to embrace believers who share faith (*īmān*), as reflected in the Qur'ānic verse: “*The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers*”.³ Al-Qurṭubī establishes that this religious brotherhood exists above any blood or tribal ties according to his explanation.⁴

¹ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1991), h. 2585.

² Ibn Khaldūn. *al-Muqaddimah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2004), v. 1, p. 120.

³ Qur’ān 49:10

⁴ al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, v. 16, p. 334.

According to Islamic teachings, group bonding works positively as long as members use it to pursue goodness and justice. According to Al-Nawawī, the unacceptable version of ʿaṣabiyyah occurs when loyalty becomes unseeing, thus bringing about injustice.¹ Islam differentiates between proper ethical group affinity and improper tribal loyalties. The Qurʾān praises recognizing and backing righteous behavior within one’s group, yet forbids the defense of wrong acts merely because of group membership. Under Qurʾānic teaching, people must apply justice during dealings with their family and closest relatives and above all to themselves, as Qurʾān states: “*O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives*”.² According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who studied classical tafsīr, the verse completely eliminates all possible reasons for favoritism tied to familial relationships.³

In all circumstances, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established an absolute rejection of tribal identity while conducting his interactions. He warned his companions of the danger of invoking tribal slogans as disputes started between them. The Prophet (PBUH) scolded both Emigrants (*Muhājirūn*) and Helpers (*Anṣār*) after they exchanged their tribal chants during an argument between the groups, saying, “Leave it, for it is rotten”.⁴ Ibn Ḥajar describes the corruption as “rotten” in his commentary on this verse since tribalism produces destructive conflicts.⁵ The social infrastructure of Islamic civilization eventually evolved because of this ethical practice. Through this ethos, the Islamic community integrated Arabs along with Persians, Africans and additional groups on their equal status. Prominent figures like Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, a former Ethiopian slave, rose to positions of honor due to their piety, not ethnicity. Scholar Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal stated

¹ Al-Nawawī, Yahya ibn Sharaf. *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2000), v. 16, p. 178.

² Qurʾān 4:135

³ al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, v. 10, p. 35.

⁴ al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 2001), h. 4905.

⁵ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. *Fath al-Bārī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1959), v. 8, p. 628.

that virtues cannot be inherited through race, yet taqwā (God-consciousness) remains the only thing that brings virtue.¹

Today's Islamic scholarship emphasizes the risks of 'aşabiyyah because nationalism and racism powerfully divide people in the present time. The Islamic tenets for universal brotherhood stand against loyalistic passions according to the view of Muhammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī. According to him, loyalty to the nation that exceeds loyalty to justice and truth transforms into a contemporary 'aşabiyyah manifestation.² According to Islamic authority, any revivalist movement should establish its activism on principles of justice, ummah unity and mercy rather than ethnic pride and sectarianism. Success becomes impossible for any movement that drives itself through 'aşabiyyah because this opposes the core essence of Islamic unity and equity.

The Islamic and Western viewpoints concerning group identity differ as presented in this comparative table:

Aspect	Islamic View	Western Modern View
Basis of Identity	Faith, piety, righteousness.	Nationality, ethnicity, culture.
View on Tribal Loyalty	Condemned if unjust; loyalty must be based on truth and justice.	Group loyalty often celebrated (e.g., nationalism, patriotism).
Goal of Social Unity	Unity of <i>ummah</i> based on faith and justice.	Unity within national, ethnic, or cultural boundaries.
Ethical Standard	Justice above all group loyalties. ³	Varies: sometimes justice, sometimes collective interest.

The table shows that Islam prohibits 'aşabiyyah to construct a genuine society by embracing justice, true brotherhood and faith. Islam shows that any loyalty that lacks righteousness leads to moral destruction in society.

¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992), v. 1, p. 233.

² al-Būṭī, Muhammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān. *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2015), p. 56.

³ Qur'ān 4:135

Through achieving this Qur'ānic vision, the modern fractured world has access to both moral coexistence guidance and spiritual religious principles.

The Formation of the Ummah: A New Ethical Brotherhood

Muslim religious breakthrough was designed more than a simple spiritual change because it established ummah—a faith-based spiritual brotherhood that transcended traditional social boundaries of tribe, race or economics. Through the introduction of ummah, people gained a new identity that moved beyond ethnic differences, thus forming a community dedicated to caring for others and justice while following the doctrine of God. Allah says in the Qur'ān, “*Indeed, this nation of yours is one nation, and I am your Lord, so fear Me*”.¹ According to Ibn Kathīr, this passage defines the religious connection of believers above all human relationships, including bloodlines.² The ethical community established by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) took shape through key leadership actions within Madinah. The Constitution of Madinah (Ṣaḥīfat al-Madīnah) provided both rights and obligations for all citizens of the city who were either Muslim or non-Muslim. Muhammad Hamidullah confirms that the Constitution of Madinah stands as the earliest known written document that created political unity through shared responsibilities among multiple religious groups.³ The text stated loyalty to the Muslim community should take precedence over tribal or ethnic connections.

The Prophet (PBUH) identified the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood as an essential religious commandment. In one authentic narration, he said, “*The Muslim is the brother of another Muslim: he does not wrong him, nor abandon him, nor despise him*”.⁴ According to Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī, faith-based ethics found in this hadith demand believers to help and defend one another.⁵ Zealous membership in Islamic

¹ Qur'ān 23:52

² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, v. 3, p. 264

³ Hamidullah, Muhammad. *The First Written Constitution in the World: An Important Document of the Time of the Holy Prophet* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1975), p. 45.

⁴ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, h. 2442.

⁵ Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bārī*, v. 5, p. 97.

brotherhood (ukhuwwah islāmiyyah) transcends economic-political affiliations since it stems from obedience to Allah alongside adherence to unified ethical conduct. The ummah model encompassed all of its members regardless of their racial, ethnic background and social stature. Bilāl ibn Rabāh, Suhayb al-Rūmī and Salmān al-Fārisī—individuals from Africa, Byzantium, and Persia—rose to prominence in the Prophet (PBUH)’s circle. History shows that Islam brought an evolutionary social framework to a society that deeply followed strict racial and tribal categories.¹ The Prophet (PBUH) declared during his Farewell Sermon, “No Arab has superiority over a non-Arab, and no non-Arab has superiority over an Arab, except by piety and good action”.²

Qur’ānic thought establishes the ummah through its moral mission of encouraging righteousness while stopping evil actions.³ According to Al-Ṭabarī, the duty to enforce good and suppress wrong conduct contrasts Muslim society with its predecessor religious communities.⁴ The ethical responsibility to establish an ummah stands beyond sociology since the Muslim brotherhood serves to defend truth alongside justice and compassion as duty-bound moral guardians. According to scholar Muhammad al-Ghazālī, the inability of Muslims to live according to the principles of ummah has led to the present political and social crises throughout the Muslim world.⁵ The Qur’ān demands that Muslims should put Islamic brotherhood first above ethnic identity, racial beliefs or sectarian claims; otherwise, they break Muslim teachings.

A comparison exists between the ethical principles that belong to the Muslim community and current Western interpretations of communal identity.

Aspect	Islamic Ummah	Western Communities
Basis of Unity	Faith, ethics, mutual rights and obligations	National identity, economic interests, ideology

¹ al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *Tarīkh al-Khulafā’* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), p. 10.

² Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. *Musnad Aḥmad*, v. 5, p. 411.

³ Qur’ān 3:110

⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, v. 6, p. 89.

⁵ al-Ghazālī, Muhammad. *Min Hawnā Nabda’* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2001), p. 121.

Inclusivity	All believers irrespective of race or background	Varies: often based on citizenship or culture
Moral Responsibility	Collective duty to enjoin good and forbid evil. ¹	Primarily personal freedom and self-interest
Ultimate Authority	Divine command and prophetic teachings	Human-made laws and constitutional frameworks

Today, Islam's conception of ummah continues to present revolutionary ideas to the world. The Islamic vision of beloved brotherhood defines an alternative path through modern fragmentation, which emerges from ethnic nationalism, economic unfairness and cultural segregation. Unified community life under this framework exists for spiritual goals rather than material advantages and moral responsibilities. Human dignity thus sanctified through divine will becomes a permanent and religious duty to establish societies that fully embrace mercy and justice together with brotherhood. The spiritual community taught in Islamic teachings delivers a historical transformation from tribalistic ethnic divisions into an ethical faith-focused fraternity bound by collective religious belief. The plan stands as an essential model to establish ethical and merciful societies and continues to be vital for our current world, which stands apart due to its disparities despite globalization.

The Prophet (PBUH)'s Practical Model of a Multi-Ethnic Ummah

Through his leadership in Madinah, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) created a functional model of a multi-ethnic Muslim community which united people through shared faith, justice and moral dedication. Under his leadership, diversity served as an asset, which became powerful through a sacred moral structure that unified the community. Through his ummah, which united Arabs and Persians and Africans and Romans and Jews and others, the Prophet (PBUH) showed that Islamic brotherhood paid no regard to race or ethnicity. Allah declares, "*And We made you into nations 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*".² The verse establishes both the respect for diversity and righteousness (*taqwā*) as the exclusive determinant for

¹ Qur'an 3:110

² Qur'an 49:13

differentiation according to Ibn ‘Āshūr.¹ Through appointing Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, an Abyssinian, to become the first person to announce the call for prayer, the Prophet (PBUH) demonstrated his dedication toward his mission. The Muslim community saw no difference in Bilāl’s worth because his black complexion merged with his devotion and his work ethic to increase his standing within the community. According to Al-Zurqānī, Bilāl was publicly celebrated for his virtues by the Prophet (PBUH), saying, “I heard the sound of your footsteps ahead of me in Paradise”.² During this spiritual peace process, Salmān al-Fārisī gained recognition from the Prophet as “my family member.” Muslim values put aside traditional boundaries by establishing familial bonds with people who did not share ethnic origins.

The Prophet (PBUH) arranged friendship between people of all economic positions and tribal roots who became Anṣār (residents of Madinah) alongside the Muhājirūn (migrants from Makkah). Ibn Hishām reported that the establishment of these brotherhoods created legal and financial partnerships that included joint wealth distribution and inheritance rights.³ Through this action, the Prophet (PBUH) effectively destroyed the tribal divisions that were consistently present among the Arabian people. During his contact with Madinah Jews, the Prophet (PBUH) demonstrated how pluralistic relationships should work. The Constitution of Madinah established Jewish tribes as integral members of the broader community, and it offered them freedom of religion and equal political responsibilities under terms of mutual protection.⁴ Under this pact, all groups kept their religious beliefs, while the obligation to defend collectively and uphold a shared ethical code became mandatory for every member.

From his position, the Prophet (PBUH) sharply condemned instances of ethnic superiority. While conquering Makkah, the Prophet (PBUH) exposed Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī to harsh rebuke after he insulted Bilāl by referring to him as a “son of a black woman” through declaring: “You contain

¹ Ibn ‘Āshūr, Muhammad al-Ṭāhir. *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: Dār al-Su’āl, 1997), v. 26, p. 136.

² al-Zurqānī, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Bāqī. *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib al-Ladunniyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001), v. 2, p. 295.

³ Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat Ibn Hishām*, v. 2, p. 147.

⁴ Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, p. 221.

jāhiliyyah (ignorance)”¹. Through this incident, the Prophet (PBUH) demonstrated his dedication to fully eliminate the tribal racial prejudices which persisted from pre-Islamic times. Leadership positions among Muslims were determined through merit-based systems that did not account for ethnic background. The Muslim army received its leadership from Usāmah ibn Zayd, who was the son of a former slave who commanded at a very young age. The Prophet (PBUH) denied the concerns of his Companions by stating that Usāmah possessed the necessary qualifications.² The practical function of this model is demonstrated through the following table:

Aspect	Pre-Islamic Arabia	Prophetic Ummah
Basis of Social Status	Tribe, lineage, race	Piety, faith, righteousness
Leadership Eligibility	Nobility and tribal seniority	Merit, piety, competence
Relations with Others	Hostility based on tribal identity	Cooperation, respect across racial lines
Community Structure	Fragmented clans	Unified ethical brotherhood

The Prophet (PBUH)’s method introduces a disruptive organizational blueprint. He shifted cultural identities toward greater moral unity but provided respect to each group while never granting superior status to any specific identity. Modern scholar Muhammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī states that the Prophet (PBUH) implemented religious teaching about mutual recognition through ta‘āraf along with mutual assistance through ta‘āwun.³ Current global society faces an urgent need for lessons in overcoming racism, xenophobia and nationalism because it continues to be fragmented along these lines. The Islamic ummah established a lasting example for building societies that aim to achieve divine justice alongside social acceptance and moral excellence under God. Through his practical example, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) showed how racial, tribal and ethnic differences should not create divisions between humanity. Under the guidance of Allah, human beings with different traditions unite through

¹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, v. 30, p. 57.

² Ibn Kathīr, Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar. *Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1997), v. 5, p. 240.

³ Al-Būṭī, Muhammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān. *Fiqh al-Sīrah* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2003), p. 223.

faith and ethical unity and mutual respect to create one brotherhood which serves as a practical example for a universal society.

Challenges and Relevance Today

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established a multi-ethnic, ethical and fair Islamic community which represents both the challenge and necessity for today's highly divided world. Today's Muslim societies encounter serious divisions between different ethnic groups, racial, nationalistic and sectarian factions despite the Islamic teachings which provide clear guidance about unity and equality principles. The global Muslim ummah needs to understand existing challenges while reasserting the relevance of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s model to establish its integrity. Modern society faces the serious problem of 'aşabiyyah (tribalism) and nationalism alongside racism, since they resurge even within the Muslim community. The modern Islamic world fails to honor the Prophet (PBUH)'s teachings about race-free superiority due to sociocultural groups that abide by ethnic identities more than brotherhood through faith. The Prophet (PBUH) extended a strong warning that "leave ('aşabiyyah) for it is rotten".¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, among classical scholars, expressed his view that loyalties against Islamic justice and unity represent jāhiliyyah.² Ethnic divisions between Muslims have triggered interstate warfare as well as discriminatory policies and political partition in Muslim communities.

The current challenge brought by globalization shows both benefits through cultural contact and side effects of cultural dominance that push Islamic identity to the margins. While living as minorities within non-Muslim territories, Muslim individuals endure both racial discrimination and negative stereotypes of Islam along with demands that force them to abandon their religious principles. Muslim societies face social unrest, instances of injustice, and if minorities, including ethnic groups and religious communities, cannot be integrated properly. The Qur'ān offers a timeless principle for this: "*O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves*

¹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, h. 4905.

² Ibn Taymiyyah, Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm. *Iqtida' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm* (Riyadh: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1999), v. 1, p. 411.

or parents and relatives”.¹ According to Islamic justice principles, it is essential to defend minority or unpopular communities that suffer oppression, since this principle reflects the lasting significance of ethical teachings derived from the Prophet (PBUH). Economic inequality between social groups has created a wider distance between communities. During his practice, the Prophet (PBUH) demanded social unity between everyone regardless of their social or racial background. According to Al-Nawawī, the Prophet (PBUH) would eat and engage in conversations with low-income individuals and people who lacked status while sitting with them to demonstrate their value.²

The political usage of ethnic tension and religious denominations poses a significant problem. Political groups and state governments utilize ethnicity to accumulate political power. The Prophet (PBUH) taught unity through piety between people, yet modern society promotes discrimination through family ties instead. According to Ibn al-Qayyim, proper governance requires justice as the sole authority to manage societal order both among Muslim and non-Muslim members.³ Muslim societies will experience constant internal deterioration because they lack ethical leadership founded on Islamic principles. The analysis of present-day issues reveals that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)’s teachings function as both a diagnosis method and a treatment solution. His founding of the ummah established a society where all individuals are valued by their faith and character rather than their ethnic background continues as an ideal standard of practice. To revive these teachings properly, we need educational changes that teach Islamic ethics in addition to public policies securing rights for every ethnic group and communal training to generate shared commitment. These fundamental principles of Islam continue to matter in modern times, according to the following table:

Contemporary Challenge	Prophetic Guidance	Action Needed Today
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¹ Qur’ān 4:135

² Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, v. 16, p. 184.

³ Ibn al-Qayyim, Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr. *Al-Ṭuruq al-Ḥukmiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-‘Āshimah, 1995), v. 1, p. 20.

Ethnic divisions	Brotherhood based on faith and righteousness. ¹	Islamic education and social awareness
Economic disparities	Social welfare through <i>zakāt</i> and <i>waqf</i>	Revival of Islamic economic ethics
Political manipulation	Justice above loyalty to tribe or sect. ²	Ethical leadership and governance reforms
Cultural hegemony and racism	Mutual respect and human dignity (Constitution of Madinah)	Promoting inclusive community structures

Islam communicates its vision to all people without religious discrimination, including those beyond the Muslim community. Through his agreements in Madinah, the Prophet (PBUH) demonstrated a global perspective which combined mercy with justice when he made treaties with Jewish, Christian communities and his correspondence with rulers at different locations. Allah commands, “*And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds*”.³ According to this sacred verse, the ethical principles established by the Prophet (PBUH) serve all human beings. The contemporary leaders and intellectuals among Muslims need to escape limited perspectives so they can recover the broad, compassionate vision that the Prophet (PBUH) delivered. The modern Muslim identity, according to Yusuf al-Qaradawi, should move past ethnic divides by placing Islamic moral principles before all else.⁴ Today’s global crises, including racism, inequality and sectarian violence, require Muslims to restore a universal ethical society formed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through justice, compassion and diverse respect for humanity while subordinating all power to Allah. The Prophet (PBUH)’s multicultural, just and inclusive vision for his ummah provides Islam with an everlasting solution to solve current Muslim community problems, which are significant and pressing. This vision needs personal transformation along with systematic changes which integrate Islamic values throughout legal systems, economic systems education and governmental institutions.

¹ Qur’ān 49:10

² Qur’ān 4:135

³ Qur’ān 21:107

⁴ Al-Qaradawi, *Min Fiqh al-Dawlah fī al-Islām*, p. 78.

Conclusion

According to the Qur'ān, Ummah refers to an extensive spiritual community that dismantles racial boundaries along with tribal and ethnic barriers. The Qur'ān repeatedly affirms that the authentic meaning of Ummah transcends physical differences because it connects believers through shared faith, moral values, ethical practices and justice. The Ummah establishes a worldwide fellowship that joins believers through the belief in one God, commitments to respect others and acts as a single body to serve humanity. Muslims gather as a unified group across diverse communities because the essential qualification for membership rests in following Islamic guidance sent from Allah. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stressed in his teachings that Allah views believers with equal status despite their differences in social or ethnic background. The Qur'ān prompts believers to accept genuine unity, which recognizes and cherishes the differences among humans instead of considering them divisive factors. The Qur'ānic Ummah establishment aims to build a balanced society that accepts diverse human traits without any discrimination. The vision provides eternal guidance about solidarity, requiring Muslims to cross boundaries beyond social status for building a community based on shared responsibility, compassion and equality between all members. The Islamic belief about Ummah remains relevant now because it presents principles for constructing a unified and harmonious world.