Islam In Indonesia Essay, Research Paper

ISLAM IN INDONESIA

Indonesia is a archipelago situated in South-East Asia and comprises of 13 600 islands which stretch for approximately 5000km. Islam was introduced to Indonesia in the 14th century by Gujerati merchants from India. In 1478 a coalition of Muslim princes attack the remains of the Hinduism Empire expunging Hindu from the Indonesian empire. Islam has now become the dominant religion with 87% of the population adhering to Islam, 7% are Christians while the remainder are Buddhist, Catholic or Taoist. In recent years many conflicts have arisen between Muslims, Christians and Indonesia ethnic Chinese population, because of both religious and political differences. The clashes have been severe and 1000?s of people from both religions have been murdered and beaten and 100?s of Chinese women have been raped.

Indonesia was one of the few countries where Islam did not takeover purely by an invading military force. One feature of Islam that appealed to Indonesian’s is that it does not have a caste system such as the system in the Hindu religion. Before Islam was introduced, the king had the power to take a man’s wife and land. The people of Indonesia were told that in Allah?s eyes all men are made of the same clay.

The Islam found in Indonesia is influenced by Buddhist and Hindu practises which were prevalent prior to Islam. This translates to the fact that of the 190 million Muslims living in Indonesia only 5 to 10% adhere to a relatively purist form of Islam as seen in Pakistan. 30% adhere to a Javanised version of Islam, while the remainder consider themselves as only nominal Muslims.

Although a Muslim dominated population, its political and governing institutions are secular, and have little to do with Islam. Indonesia’s Muslim population does not control the countries wealth. Previous governments have restricted Islam’s influence by limiting the number of Muslim political parties by often forcing them to join together. It is now widely believed that the Muslim public have began to feel a new Muslim consciousness and are seeking justice.

The Muslims of Indonesia, like all Muslims, believe that Allah is the one and only God and Muhammad is his prophet. Muslims believe in many holy books, but that the Koran is the most important book, recited to Muhammad over a period of 23 years. They believe that there will be a judgement day when all people will rise from their graves and stand trail for their lives. Muslims also believe that Allah has predestined events, meaning that Allah has already chosen who will go to heaven and who will go to hell. Muslims insist that all citizens must have equal rights. No individual should ever be above the law, no matter how powerful, and no one beneath the law, no matter how humble. Allah taught that it was impossible to force people to believe what they do not wont too. Therefore people should be allowed to have free minds and follow any faith they may wish to. To a Muslim, the ideal society is one in which there is justice, peace, love and compassion. Muslims believe that Allah owns the soul and he decides when an individual will die. Therefore suicide and euthanasia is rejected in a Muslim society and abortion is only allowed when the life of the mother is at stake. Birth control is allowed as long as both parties consent. Islam is also completely against people having sexual intercourse before they are married as well as anyone who commits adultery. Islam also prohibits homosexuality believing that it is dirty and unnatural

The key values of Islam are faith, justice, forgiveness, compassion, mercy, sincerity, truth, generosity, humility, tolerance, modesty, chastity, patience, responsibility and courage. The behaviours that Islam abhors are hypocrisy, cheating, backbiting, suspicion, lying, pride, envy, anger, divisiveness, excess and extremism. Many of these ideas and values are forgotten by many of Indonesia?s population.

The Five Pillars of Faith influence a Muslims life in Indonesia; this is because the pillars demonstrate their beliefs in Islam. These pillars include; the recital of the creed, ?There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet?, the Salat, or prayer, which must be observed five times a day while facing the holy city of Mecca; The third pillar is known as Zakat, the payment of alms to the poor and needy. Ramadan is a period of fasting held during the ninth month of the year, it is a time when a Muslim will refrain from eating, drinking or sexual intercourse between dawn and dusk; the fifth pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca, if health and wealth permit a Muslim must trek to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime.

A Muslim?s life in Indonesia is affected by what is known as Sharia law. Sharia law is a set of regulations, principles and values from which legislation is developed. It is the detailed code of conduct or the canons comprising ways and modes of worship, standards of morals and life, laws that allow and prescribe and that judge between right and wrong. Sharia can be amended according to changing social needs and this has occurred in Indonesia. Unlike other Muslim dominated countries, Sharia does not control every aspect of the Indonesian legal system. Property disputes are not settled under Sharia, neither are many other legal disputes. Secular courts have been given authority over all religious courts even at a district level. But Sharia does play a more significant role in smaller, more isolated villages. The power of Sharia in Indonesia has been tested. In 1952 a Christian male and a Muslim female petitioned the Jakarta district court to authorise their marriage. The two were not allowed to be married because it was forbid under Sharia. The court allowed them to be married effectively meaning that state law held power over Sharia.

Islam?s ?rites of passage? also influence an Indonesians life. Rites of passage strongly influence the names that Muslim children are given, commemoration, marriages and funerals. Muslims believe that cremation is not allowed because the body will be required when Allah resurrects people from their graves on the day of judgement. In 1973 the Indonesian government introduced a marriage bill, which placed strong restrictions on polygamy and permitted inter-religious mixed marriages. These laws went against what is stated in the Koran and upset many Muslims and the law regarding mixed marriages was removed. In the present Indonesian society polygamy is regarded as morally reprehensible.

Islamic banks emerged in Indonesia in the 1960s and have since grown rapidly. There popularity among the population is a response to the growing western influences, people wish to reclaim the old values of Islam. In an Islamic banking system, interest cannot be accepted on loans or given to money in saving accounts. In an Islamic bank, a person can place money in a bank account. The bank uses this money to invest in other business and then divides the profit between them and the client at a predetermined rate. Interest was banned in the Koran because it was seen as the exploitation of the economically weak by the strong and powerful.

Indonesian women are far more socially and politically advanced than women in almost all other Less-Developed countries where Islam is the majority religion. Women in Indonesia are not required or expected to wear the hijab, but most cover their heads with a scarf. The men do not treat them as second-class citizens but men and women are segregated in houses of worship. Women, such as Megawati Sukarnoputri can hold very high positions in Indonesian society. Despite these advances Indonesian women are still not allowed to vote in any elections.

Indonesia is currently in a state of turmoil, protest constantly break out into full-scale riots and looting. The major social problem facing Indonesia currently is the escalating violence. Political analysts, Frans Magnis-Suseno said in Asia Week ?Indonesia has a tradition of violence? and in the current society this is becoming more evident. The trouble began to appear soon after Indonesia’s economy collapsed and the people were looking to find someone to blame. They were led to believe that the Chinese minority who control much of the wealth caused the problems. The indigenous people (pribumi) felt discriminated against and in the post Suharto era they were more inclined to say so. Because the majority of ethnic Chinese were of a different religion to the majority, the violence developed into Muslim verses Christian conflicts and was a demonstration of the distrust that exists towards other ethnic groups and belief systems despite the presence of widely diverse groups that live in Indonesia.

Indonesian people from both cultures also began to protest against the widespread corruption that is institutionalised in the Indonesian parliament and governing bodies. After Suharto was re-elected unopposed the people took to the street. They had enough of their government. These protests readily turn into full-scale riots and Indonesia’s people turned their anger to racial and religious differences. People also wish to end the military?s role in Indonesia?s government. This resulted in army officers such as General Wiranto taking being given less prominent roles in the newly formed government. Indonesia?s frustrations also boiled over onto the street because in June the World Bank estimated that as many as 50 million people are not eating the minimum amount of calories needed to stay healthy. This is because in less than two months the price of rice doubled.

It is also widely believed that the violence in instigated and encouraged by people on the verge of power, including members of the Indonesian army. Men who are well out of their teens have been seen wearing school uniforms. Many army uniforms have gone missing and it is suspected that the people wearing these have fired shots at students to prompt a violent reaction from them and reduce their creditability. These people have been exploiting Islam because Islam is supposed to respect other religions, not burn their churches.

Conflicts between religious groups have developed for many other reasons. Many Muslim extremists are working to make Indonesia an Islamic state. Many other Muslims and people from minority religions strongly oppose this view. The newly elected president Abdurrahman Wahid is totally against making Indonesia an Islamic state. He believes that his people should subscribe to nationalism first and Islam second and has always tried to improve relations between Christians and Muslims and between the Pribumi and ethnic Chinese. After his election as president, many extremists held heated protests throughout the archipelago.

In Ambon the religions are almost evenly divided among the populous. The two groups have been living harmoniously for many years and the two groups have been working together in business and on civic projects. Yet, recently the situation has changed. The most probable cause of the violence was an argument between a Christian bus driver and a Muslim migrant. From this small incident the violence spread and intensified. Mobs burned several businesses and left Christian and Chinese shops intact. Barricades and signs such as, “You are now entering Muslim territory”, were erected and to travel to certain areas a person must recite a prayer as a proof of religion. Leaders from both sides have stated that they are only defending their respective communities.

The ethnic Chinese population who are living in Indonesia are among the wealthy people of Indonesia. The Chinese are barred from the military and the civic service. Ethnic Indonesian?s feel resentment towards them and have resorted to beating, murdering and arson in an attempt to get rid of the ethnic Chinese so the pribumi can take over their business and wealth. One of the strongest cases to show Indonesia?s resentment towards ethnic Chinese occurred after a mayor in Java blocked plans to build a school on an old Chinese cemetery. Mobs ransacked the graveyard, dug up the corpses and stole the valuables that were buried along side the dead and the coffins and marble headstones were stolen and sold.

At present Islam is being used as a vehicle for people to cause disruption and further their own ambitions and gain more power. They are using the uneducated and bigoted people in Indonesia?s society. The people of Indonesia, from almost all religions, have forgotten the values that their respective religions are meant to uphold. The chaos is caused by religion and many religious leaders are doing little to stop and prevent the violence. Hostile groups send out bands of vigilantes to roam the streets, beat people and then flee to their respective churches or mosques. No matter what the violence and protest are for; it is almost always tinged with a religious purpose.