

## SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ISLAM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HUMAN EQUALITY

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### Abstract

Islam is a complete code of life, there is not a single dimension related to human beings which has not been touched. Islam has emphasized several principles so that relationship among members of the society may be justly and fairly organized. Foremost among these principles is social justice with all the denotations and connotations the term may involve. The aim behind social justice in Islam was to found a society that enjoys peace, fraternity, love and welfare. Justice ('Adl) in Islam is significant as it is one of the 99 attributes of Allah, "Allah Almighty is the ever Just". Justice is the central universal value and a basic objective of Islam, to the degree that it stands next in order of priority to belief in God's exclusive right to worship (Tawhīd) and the truth of Muhammad's Prophethood. Social justice in Islam is closely related to the concept of right. For every human being have certain rights and justice means rendering everyone each due. The essence of justice in Islam is the recognition that all the human beings are entitled to equal social status and equal rights. In order to preserve Justice in society, there should not be any type of superiority, privilege and priority on the basis of the language, color, class, creed, sex. All human beings should be treated as equals without any distinction. Therefore, the paper is a humble effort to describe in detail how far Islam protects the rights of humans in order to preserve justice in society.

**Keywords:** Islam, Quran, Social Justice, Human Equality

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Justice means equality, judging equally, is the opposite of oppression (*jawr*) (Ibn Manzūr, 1414, IV: 153). Justice literally means "the putting of something in its rightful place, the place where it belongs. (Qutb,1986,1: 379). It is expressed in the Qur'ān with the words '*adl* and '*qist*'. The words are derived from the root alphabet letters *a-d-l* mean right (Ibn Manzūr, 1414, XI: 430), rectifying ('*addalah*), balancing, coequal (Fairuzabadi, 2005: 1030). Justice is an ethical virtue and a human feature (Abdullah, VI/3: 275), it is the most frequently emphasized concept in organizing human relations. Justice, which includes delivering and observing right and respecting human rights, is a moral, legal, philosophical, religious, and at the same time universal value. So, justice in Islam has been considered the basis of social life and the essence of governing. Justice is to give everybody-Muslim or non-Muslims, their rights and the true teaching shows what the inalienable rights of all people should be (Hatemi, 1989: 81). It is impossible for a believer to be an enemy of a race, color, family, language or nation. Her/his only hostility is against superstition, oppression and imperialism (Hatemi, 1989: 33).

Prior to the emergence of Islam, the entire world was divided into systems of personal rule of despotic or autocratic nature. The logical and natural result of this division has been the rule of one elite class or minority headed by a king / monarch over majority with slave ownership and

their sale and purchase and exploitation as well as misuse and abuse of women. In this scenario, the clouds of uncertainty always hovered over the horizons. The actual condition of the world before the appearance of Islam on the scene can be briefly judged from J.H. Denison's portrayal of the state of the civilized world at the time of the appearance of Islam on the theatre of history; he says: "It seemed then that the great civilization that it had taken four thousand years to construct was on the verge of the disintegration, and that mankind was likely to return to that condition of barbarism where every tribe and sect was against the next, and law and order were unknown. The older tribal sanctions had lost their power. Hence the old imperial methods would no longer operate. The new sections created by Christianity were working division and destruction instead of unity and order. It was a time fraught with tragedy. Civilization, like a gigantic tree whose foliage had overarched the world and whose branches had borne the golden fruits of art and science and literature, stood tottering, its trunk no longer alive with the flowing sap of devotion and reverence, but rotted to the core, raven by the storms of war, and held together only by the cords of ancient customs and laws, that might snap at any moment. Was there any new type, for the old sanctions and ceremonials were dead, and to build up others of the same kind would be the work of centuries" (Denison, 267-68). What a keen and sensitive reader may gather from this passage is that pre-Islamic world, despite its monumental glory and beauty of culture and civilization, with its traces and remains extant now here and there, was a world torn apart in between states of enmity, hostility, insecurity, uncertainty and occasional wars always ready to disrupt any time at any place. In this dismal and miserable situation, the prospect of human equality was a thing undreamt of. The condition of common man, woman and slaves was deplorable. Rights to equality and freedom in the tribal Arab society were not seen as "rights". In fact, that society used to deny those rights and consider violating them a sign of power and sovereignty (Hitti, 1970: 23). Even the concept of justice in Arabia was purely patriarchal inside the family and the tribe, and between different tribes a rough and ready balancing up through a succession of tribal feuds and vendettas. The administration of justice on the basis of law, rights, duties, and penalties through the machinery of courts and judges was something unfamiliar to the Arabs. Islam appeared in this chaotic state of affairs. The function of religion and religious life in Islam is primarily to raise a community based on justice for the welfare of mankind. Establishing justice is the law of Allah (swt). *"Indeed Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded."* (Quran 16: 90)

s Allah says in the Quran

It is part of the balance which Allah has created as justice lead to the peace in the society. The centrality of justice to the value structure of Islam was portrayed clearly in the Qur'ān. As God said: *"We sent our Messengers (rusūlanā) with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and measure in order to establish justice among the people (Al-Qur'ān, al-Hadīd, 57: 25).* The phrase "our messengers" confirmed that justice had been the goal of all the scripture revealed to humankind. Islam established social justice on a social basis. This means that the Islamic theory of justice has a practical application to human society. It is not merely a religious theory in a world of shadow or verbally expressed without any relevance to the reality of human life.

The basis of social justice is built on the recognition that all humans are equal and it means creating harmony. Equality in Islam means the equality of rights and freedom under the *Shariah* law. There could be neither noble blood nor despised people, since all humankind was created in the same way from dust and *nutfa* (male semen and discharged female ovum, that is, Adam's

offspring (*Al-Qur'ān, al-Mursalāt* 77: 20-23) Once we accept the principle of human equality only then we can create a just society but for that we need to reject all racism, nationalism, and ethnocentrism. This is something some people find difficult to accept; but that is the one remedy leading us towards justice and peace. It is the Creator first who has maintained human equality by affirming the fact in His divine Book repeatedly that all resources of the universe have been dedicated for the service of all human beings equally. Everybody has all rights of access to reach and approach the resources available in the universe on equal basis. Allah has already made everything available, dutiful and submissive to all without any discrimination. The only task which is left to the man is to explore the opportunities to make the things in his favor. Let us read the Holy Qur'ān in this regard: “*He it is Who created for you all that is on the earth*” (*Al-Qur'ān, al-Baqarah*, 2:29). Same has been repeated in another fashion: “*See you not (O man!) that Allah has subjected for you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth.*” (*Al-Qur'ān, al-Luqman*, 31:20). Therefore Allah maintained this also for His best creation by laying the foundation of the social system on the conception that all human beings are equal before the law; and as such they belong to one universal brotherhood. Discrimination due to race, sex, color, lineage, class, region or language is vehemently prohibited to avoid the artificial barriers between the privileged and underprivileged.

All humanity, according to Islam, with all its races, has one original source, so nobody can exploit others claiming superiority or special privilege. The Qur'ān is quite clear about the issue of the claimed superiority or inferiority of any human, male or female:

*O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (one who is) the most righteous of you And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)* (*Al-Qur'ān, al-Hujrāt*, 49:13).

*O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife [Hawwa (Eve)], and from them both He created many men and women; and fear Allah through Whom you demand (your mutual rights), and (reverence) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah is ever an All-Watcher over you.* (*Al-Qur'ān, al-Nisa*, 4:1)

A few observations about these verses may be helpful in tracing the foundation of human equality before Allah:

- a) These begin by addressing not only Muslims but the whole of mankind, irrespective of their gender and their national or religious backgrounds. As such, it is a universal declaration to all made by the Creator of all.
- b) These state that there is no scope for aristocratic approach in Islam as all human beings are from the same origin. “*O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam), He created his wife [Hawwa] (Eve).*”
- c) These state that there is only One Creator of all mankind. As such, there is no room for ethnic, territorial supremacy or superiority based on one's having been created by a “superior” God, as there is only One God (Allah). Nor is there any basis for a caste system based on some having been created in a way which is “different” from others or is superior. As Prophet

Muhammad ﷺ explained, “... *You all belong to Adam, and Adam was created from dust.*” In the process of human reproduction, there is no superiority or inferiority; kings and paupers, males and females, are created from what the Qur’ān describes as “*despised fluid.*” Our having been created by the One and Only Creator implies our basic equality before Him; He is just to all.

- d) Being a faithful creature, servant and worshipper of the One God is at the heart of one’s real spirituality and humanness. In this, the essence of gender equality finds its most profound basis.
- e) The verses state that all human beings are created *min dhakar in wa-untha*, which can be translated literally as “of male and female.” This means in pairs, as the Qur’ān explicitly mentions elsewhere “*And We created you in pairs*’ (Al-Quran, an-Naba, 78: 8). Each component of the pair is as necessary and as important as the other and hence is equal to him or her. The wording of this verse has been commonly translated also as “from a (single pair of) a male and female,” referring to Adam and Eve. This serves as a reminder to all mankind that they belong to the same family, with one common set of parents. As such they are all equal, as brothers and sisters in that broad and “much extended” family.
- f) Variations in gender, languages, and ethnic backgrounds and, by implication, religious claims do not provide any basis for superiority or inferiority. The implication of “*that you may know each other*” (Al-Qur’ān, al-hujrāt, 49:13) is that such variations constitute a deliberate mosaic that Allah created, which is more interesting and more beautiful than a single “color” or a “unisex.”
- g) Most significant is the clear categorical statement that the most honored person in the sight of Allah is the one who is the most pious and righteous. This precludes any other basis for superiority, including gender (Badawi, 2016: 7-8)
- h) The verses also corrected the misinterpretation of the role of women in society, who had been regarded as useless and had become the cause of calamity and malice in the family. In reality, women were created to be men’s partners in life so that the relationship between both parties would extend to form a family and from the family would evolve a society (Qutub, 1986: 1: 574-575).
- i) These urge it was the Creator of humankind who called upon people to co-operate and unite. Thus there was no reason for people to ignore this divine call, for differences in the color of skin, languages and tribes should not be the basis of dispute. Such differences were purposely created by God so that people would come together to co-operate with and to know one another in faith and humanity. Moreover, it was not the sex, language, country of origin, and nationality that were taken into consideration in God’s measurement (*hisāb Allah*). Indeed, there was only one measurement of the value of human’s kindness: “*the most honorable among you with Allah is that (believer) who has al-taqwa (fear of God)*” (Qutb, Zilāl, 6: 3348).

The holy Prophet ﷺ emphasized: “*Oh Mankind! Your Lord is One. Your Father is one. All of you belong to Adam. And Adam is created of soil. Truly, the most honorable person in the Sight of Your*

*Lord, the Almighty Allah, is the most pious among you. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab. There is no superiority for a non-Arab over an Arab. There is no superiority for a red (race) person over a white person. Likewise, there is no superiority of a white over a red (race) person, except for the piety and God consciousness” (Ahmad bin Hanbal, 23536, p: 411/5)*

To maintain equality and justice between both men and women, Islam had provided guidelines for the functions and tasks which both sexes have to take on in life according to their mental and physical capabilities. Allah has given the same basic responsibilities to women as well as men. Allah has given these six responsibilities to women and men as in the Quran as follow:

*“The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His Mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise”. On his authority from Ibn 'Abbas men and women have the same responsibilities and Allah has declared in this verse that He will have mercy on those who will perform these responsibilities be they male or female. Women are not exempted from any of these obligations and responsibilities because of their gender. (Al-Quran, at-Tawba, 9:71)*

Human equality in Islam also demanded the assurance of an individual's rights, respect and honor as a human being, irrespective of race, tribe, language and faith. This, again, returns to the basis of humankind as a whole who belongs to Adam and comes from dust. If Adam was honored, then his children were all equal in every respect. It was because of the honor and nobility of humankind 'that Islam prohibited insulting or slandering one another, since every individual had his or her own sanctity, which should not be violated by others: "*Do not spy into one another's affairs, and do not indulge in backbiting against one another*", (Al-Qur'ān, al-Hujrāt: 12) To maintain the principle of human equality, Islam also demanded that Muslims not be suspicious of other members of society, Muslim or non-Muslim. "*Indeed, some types of suspicion are sinful (Al-Qur'ān, 49: 12)*

The above Islamic principles of human equality could not be found in other systems known to humankind in this modern age. Islam established the concept of equality by combining the fear of God (*al-taqwa*) and the purification of human souls from all the evil desires described above. In fact these principles were the basis of all other Islamic principles in order to bring a just human society.

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