



Social Justice: In The Traditional Knowledge System of Islam

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Abstract

The research reels off the meaning, definition, importance, application of social justice. Social justice was ever needed and felt throughout the human society in the world. Its genuine doers were always rewarded with honour and trust by the fellow beings. And its malfunction were always disgusted by males and females, youngsters and adults, the poor and the rich etc.. Take example of a child who keeps a piece of chocolate with someone. After a moment he comes back and finds that the keeper has eaten a bite of it. He displeases with the person and looks with an accusing eye as he is guilty of a breach of trust. So it is too easy to be understood by all and sundry. This term has become popular after the Second World War though it has been practiced from the time immemorial. This is a concept of fair and just relations between the individual and the society. It is measured in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, fair and foul, just and unjust, violence and peace, vulnerability and safety, rights and duties, greed and compassion and so on. Throughout the world, thousands of agencies like U.N.O., democracies, kingdoms, universities, colleges, labour unions, private foundations, public charities, theologians etc. claim to be the harbinger of social justice. Some of them are genuine whereas some are disguised in that form to accelerate their personal motives. This insincere show off is the real obstacle for such a sacred job. "Who can make us sincere in practicing social justice?" is the question that tempts us to become accountable not to our worldly supervisors but the Supervisor of the whole world, the Omniscient, Omnipotent, Almighty, The Master of the Day of Judgment. This study will find out solution for the previous question in the traditional knowledge System of Islam which presents a complete solution for social justice.

So the study is divided into four sections. The first section presents introduction and the meanings of the related terms of the topic. The second section counts the historical accounts and practice of Social Justice. The third section reflects social justice in Islamic perspective. The fourth section propounds different aspects of Social Justice in the Traditional Knowledge System of Islam. The final section summarizes and concludes the study.

Keywords

Social: of or related to people or society.

Justice: the process or result of using laws to fairly judge and punish crimes and criminals.

Traditional: existing in or as part of a tradition; long established.

Knowledge: information, understanding, or skill that you get from experience or education.

Social Justice: The objective of creating a fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognized and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest.

Hadith: The collective body of traditions relating to Mohammad (pbuh) and his companions



Ummah: Muslim Community

Introduction

Social justice is an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights; security, opportunities, obligations and social benefits. Laws aimed at promoting the social functioning of individuals and groups at protecting their rights. Social justice refers to the concept of a just society, where "justice" refers to more than just the administration of laws. It is based on the idea of a society which gives individuals and groups fair treatment and a just share of the benefits of society. It is a concept of honest and fair exchange of services between the individual and society. Man, being social animal, has innumerable rights and duties, in his day to day life, ensured by his society to receive the basic benefits and onus of cooperation. There are institutions like public schools, public health, public services, labour law, regulations of markets, consumer forums, social insurance, taxation to ensure fair distribution of wealth, and equal opportunities. John stated in Utilitarianism his view that "Society should treat all equally well who have deserved equally well of it, that is, who have deserved equally well absolutely. This is the highest abstract standard of social and distributive justice; towards which all institutions, and the efforts of all virtuous citizens, should be made in the utmost degree to converge."

The United Nations' 2006 document *Social Justice in an Open World: the Role of the United Nations*, states that "Social justice may be broadly understood as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth ..."

The authorities from the basic unit of society (family) to governments of different nations as well as U.N.O. all claim to implement social justice in their domain but most of their efforts are devoid of sincerity. Every sane person in this world understands social justice well. For instance, when a person commits a criminal act and is produced for trial in a court of law, he tries to prove that he is not unjust. Similarly, if some people commit theft jointly, they talk about just and equal distribution of booty and get annoyed at the partner who wants a lion's share from it. It is very common that whenever a person is harmed physically while protecting the rights of the fellow beings and upholding the cause of social justice or takes a firm stand against the oppressor, his act becomes praiseworthy to folk in general. It is natural that man supports justice and condemns injustice.

All the societies in the world talk about truthfulness, justice and rational laws. Every regime claims to safeguard people's rights and welfare. But there is hardly any law that can claim to be so perfect that nobody is deprived of his rights. Scarcely, we know any law maker who has never been biased and never been affected by personal prejudices. The laws of the land for every society have limitations that have lacuna as well as the constraints of implementation by the law mongers. Genuinely, social justice is the duty of soul which has the capacity to distinguish our just and unjust behaviour.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: HISTORY AND PRACTICE

Luigi Taparelli d' Azeglio was an Italian Catholic scholar of the Society of Jesus who coined the term 'Social Justice' in 1840. Antonio Rosmini, the classical liberal publicized it. Luigi was particularly concerned with the problems arising from the industrial revolution. . After the social revolutions of 1848, the church decided to enter the conflict raging between the 'laissez-faire' liberal capitalists and socialists .In 1850, Taparelli co-founded Civiltà Cattolica with Carlo Maria Curci. He attacked the tendency to separate morality from positive law, and also the "heterodox spirit" of unconstrained freedom of conscience which destroyed the unity of society. Taparelli opined that society is not a



monolithic group of individuals, but of various levels of sub-societies, with individuals being members of these. Each level of society has both rights and duties which should be recognized and supported. All levels of society should cooperate rationally and not resort to competition and conflict. Since the Second World War, social justice has become to mean something very different. The socialist conception of it won out over its rivals and gained solitary possession of the field. The term now stands for a very particular view of what is right and wrong in society. It has become a material concept rather than a formal one. During the events of 1848-49 many of the Italian states obtained constitutions from their sovereigns. These were uniformly modeled on the French constitution of 1789. This was the immediate context that gave birth to the concept of "social justice". Originally, when the idea of "Social Justice" was first developed, it was a formal concept rather than a material one. Simply, it was a branch of the ordinary concept of justice, analogous to "cumulative justice" or "criminal justice" and did not imply any particular content, philosophy, or view of the world. Social Justice is a religious conception because it originated in religious circles, a large part of its conceptual development in official statements of religious authorities, and has been adopted most enthusiastically by the members of religious organizations. Since 1931 it has been part of the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Philosophers seem to have come to it late: only since the publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971 when it appears to have received much explicit attention from them. Rawls' theory itself describes social justice.

Plato wrote in *The Republic* that it would be an ideal state that "every member of the community must be assigned to the class for which he finds himself best fitted." Plato believed rights existed only between free people, and the law should take "account in the first instance of relations of inequality in which individuals are treated in proportion to their worth and only secondarily of relations of equality." Reflecting this time when slavery and subjugation of women was typical, ancient views of justice tended to reflect the rigid class systems that still prevailed. On the other hand, for the privileged groups, strong concepts of fairness and the community existed. Distributive Justice was said by Aristotle to require that people were distributed goods and assets according to their merit.

Socrates (through Plato's dialogue *Crito*) is attributed with developing the idea of a social contract, whereby people ought to follow the rules of a society, and accept its burdens because they have accepted its benefits.

After the Renaissance and Reformation, the modern concept of social justice, as developing human potential, began to emerge through the work of a series of authors. Baruch Spinoza in 'On the Improvement of the Understanding' (1677) contended that the one true aim of life should be to acquire "a human character much more stable than [one's] own", and to achieve this "pitch of perfection... The chief good is that he should arrive, together with other individuals if possible, at the possession of the aforesaid character." During the enlightenment and responding to the French and American Revolutions, Thomas Paine similarly wrote in 'The Rights of Man' (1792) society should give "genius a fair and universal chance" and so "the construction of government ought to be such as to bring forward... all that extent of capacity which never fails to appear in revolutions."

Social Justice in Islam: Introduction

Islam teaches a final judgment with the righteous rewarded paradise and unrighteous punished in hell. Religious concepts and practices include the Five Pillars of Islam, which are obligatory acts of worship, and following Islamic laws, which **touches on virtually every aspect of life and society, from banking and social welfare to women and the environment.** In the Islamic worldview, justice

denotes placing things in their rightful place. It also means giving others equal treatment. In Islam, justice is also a moral virtue and an attribute of human personality, as it is in the Western tradition. Justice is close to equality in the sense that it creates a state of equilibrium in the distribution of rights and duties, but they are not identical. Sometimes, justice is achieved through inequality, like in unequal distribution of wealth. The Prophet of Islam declared: “There are seven categories of people whom God will shelter under His shade on the Day when there will be no shade except His. [One is] the just leader.”(Saheeh Muslim) God spoke to His Messenger in this manner: “O My slaves, I have forbidden injustice for Myself and forbade it also for you. So avoid being unjust to one another.” (Saheeh Muslim) Thus, justice represents moral rectitude and fairness, since it means things should be where they belong.

In Islamic tradition, the idea of social justice has been presented as one of its principal values, and the practice of social service at its various forms has been instructed and encouraged. A Muslim's religious life remains incomplete if not attended by service to humanity. The following verse of the Quran is often cited to consider the Islamic idea of social welfare:

“It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity, to fulfill the contracts which we have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God fearing” (Quran 2:177).Islam has defined the duties to parents, neighbor, relatives, sick people, the old, and the minority group. Hadith Qudsi (sacred hadith) recorded that God, on the Day of Judgment, will be displeased with those who do not care for the sick people, and who do not give food to those who ask. God will interrogate them and demand explanation from them. This hadith is seen as a reminder of human beings’ obligation to respond to the needs of others.^[5] The individual, the family, the state, and the non-government organizations — all are responsible for the performance of social responsibilities, and for the promotion of social welfare.

Different Aspects of Social Justice in Islam:

The Quran tells that the believers have been sent for the betterment of mankind, that they will promote what is good, and prevent what is wrong (3:110). Now let us go through different aspects of social justice encapsulated in Islamic traditional knowledge system:

(A) Distribution of Wealth: If a citizen gains wealth in the forms of agricultural product, money, jewelry etc., does not belong to him or his family alone. Islam obliges a Muslim to pay Sadqa and Zakat.

Sadaqah

Sadaqah means voluntary charity which is given out of compassion, love, friendship (fraternity), religious duty, or generosity. Both the Quran and the hadith have put much emphasis on spending money for the welfare of needy people. The Quran says: 'Spend something (in charity) out of the substance which We have bestowed on you, before Death should come to any of you' (63:10). One of the early teachings of Muhammad (pbuh) was that Allah expects men to be generous with their wealth and not to be miserly. Accumulating wealth without spending them to address the needs of the poor is generally prohibited and admonished.

Zakat

In Islam, zakat is a form of compulsory alms-giving, and a religious obligation for those Muslims who are financially affluent. They are required to pay one-fortieth (2.5%) of their total income or money each



year to those Muslims who are poor and helpless. The Quran says: 'And woe to those who join gods with Allah, who practice not regular charity, and who deny the Hereafter' (41: 6-7). Zakat is considered by Muslims to be an act of piety through which one expresses concern for the well being of fellow muslims as well as preserving social harmony between the wealthy and the poor. Zakat promotes a more equitable redistribution of wealth and fosters a sense of solidarity amongst members of the Ummah.

(B) Racial Discrimination:

In human history, racial discrimination has long been a cause of injustice. One important aspect of Islam is that it regards human beings as *equal children of Adam*. As a religion, Islam does not recognize the racial discrimination among people. In his Farewell Khutbah (sermon), Muhammad (pbuh) repudiated the discrimination based on race and color. Islam recognizes no distinction among human beings based on color, language or tribe. All are considered equal in receiving human rights and in discharge duties. According to Islamic teaching, no privileged exists except those having piety or moral excellence. A Quranic injunction forbids the Muslims to underestimate others. Assuming that there will be natural differences in social status and income among individuals which is the natural outcome due to the differences in personal talents and efforts, a sense of brotherhood towards fellow Muslims and a general sense of humanity towards every human being have been suggested to be cultured to further establish equality in society.

(C) Rights of Children

Islamic law and the traditions of Muhammad (pbuh) have laid out the rights of children in Islam. Children have the rights to be fed, clothed, and protected until reaching adulthood; rights to be treated equally among the siblings; rights not to be forced by its step parents or its birth parents; and rights to education. Parents are also responsible for teaching their children basic Islamic beliefs, religious duties and good moral qualities like proper mannerism, honesty, truthfulness, modesty, and generosity. The Quran forbids harsh and oppressive treatment of orphaned children while urging kindness and justice towards them. It also condemns those who do not honor and feed the orphaned children (Quran 89: 17-18)

Muhammad (pbuh) has been described as being very fond of children in general. In one Islamic tradition, Muhammad (pbuh) ran after Hussien, his grandson, in a game until he caught him. He comforted a child whose pet nightingale had died. Muhammad played many games with children, joked with them and befriended them. Muhammad also showed love to children of other religions. Once he visited his Jewish neighbor's son when the child was sick

(D) Parents and Relatives

In Islam, special importance has been attached to the service and rights of parents. Respecting and obeying one's parents has been made a religious obligation, and ill-treatment to them is forbidden in Islamic jurisprudence and Islamic tradition. With regard to the rights of parents, the Qur'anic injunction is to behave well with them, to take care of them especially in their old age, not to be rude to them, and to show highest respect to them. This injunction is to be applied regardless of parents' religious identity, that is, a Muslim person is to respect and serve their parents whether they be Muslim or non-Muslim. Hadith literature provides plenty of instances where Muhammad (pbuh) has commanded his companions to be good and kind to their parents and to serve them in the best possible manner. Insulting or misbehaving with one's parents has been declared a major sin. Mother, however, has been given priority over father in terms of receiving respect and service from children. The high status of mother in Islam is best exemplified by the saying of Muhammad (pbuh) that "paradise is at the feet of your

mothers". Similarly, importance has also been attached to the rights of relatives. A two-fold approach is generally prescribed with regard to the duties to the relatives: keeping good relation with them, and offering financial help if necessary. Maintaining good relation with one's relatives has been emphasized, and severing ties with them has been admonished. It is said in the hadith, "The person who severs the bond of kinship will not enter Paradise.

(E) Rights of Women

Under Islamic law, marriage was no longer viewed as a status but rather as a contract, in which the woman's consent was imperative, either by active consent or silence. "The dowry, previously regarded as a bride-price paid to the father, became a nuptial gift retained by the wife as part of her personal property". Qur'an Surah 4:19 "O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may take away part of the dowry ye have given them, except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and God brings about through it a great deal of good." In this scripture it is explained by Sahih Muslim that this speaks to men to take care of their wives, and those who do not, will suffer the consequences.

William Montgomery Watt states that Muhammad (pbuh), in the historical context of his time, can be seen as a figure that testified on behalf of women's rights and improved things considerably. Watt explains: "At the time Islam began, the conditions of women were terrible – they had no right to own property, were supposed to be the property of the man, and if the man died everything went to his sons." Muhammad, however by "instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education and divorce, gave women certain basic safeguards."

In Sahih al-Muslim, Abu Huraira (companion of Mohammad (pbuh)) reported that a person came to the Prophet and asked: "Who among the people is most deserving of a fine treatment from my hand? He said: Your mother. He again said: Then who (is the next one)? He said: Again it is your mother (who deserves the best treatment from you). He said: Then who (is the next one)? He, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) said: Again, it is your mother. He (again) said: Then who? Thereupon he said: Then it is your father." This is one example that many scholars use to show the inclusion of women and their rights in Islam.

(F) Rights of the Neighbors

"Gabriel kept on recommending me about treating the neighbors in a kind and polite manner, so much so that I thought that he would order me to make them my heirs." Saheeh al-Bukhari,8:73:44

Regardless of a neighbor's religious identity, Islam tells the Muslims to treat their neighboring people in the best possible manners and not to cause any difficulty to them. The Quran tells the Muslims to stand by their neighbors in the latter's everyday needs. Muhammad (pbuh) is reported as saying, "A man is not a believer who fills his stomach while his neighbor is hungry." One typical hadith on neighbors reads as follows: Narrated Abu Shuraih: The Prophet said, "By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!" It was said, "Who is that, O Allah's Apostle?" He said, "That person whose neighbor does not feel safe from his evil."

(G) Rights of the minorities

Today, minority rights in Muslim countries are severely curtailed. Historically, however, non-Muslim minorities have frequently enjoyed greater freedom in Muslim lands than in the Christian world. This was particularly the case in the Ottoman and Mughal Empires. These freedoms were enjoyed by the people of the Books, as well as by other non-Muslim peoples. The protection of minority rights are



regarded as imperative under Islamic law which is in harmony with other international laws for the minority.

(H) Moral Behavior

Islamic tradition holds that moral qualities and good actions elevate the status of a man. The Quran and the hadith serve as the primary source of moral and ethical guidance in Islamic theology. Both the Quran and the hadith often speak in emphatic manners to instruct the Muslims to adopt a morally good character. In particular, respecting parents and elders, having love for the younger, greeting people in correct manner, showing kindness to fellow people, caring for the sick, asking permission before entering into others' house, speaking the truth, and avoiding rude and false speech have been emphasized. The typical Islamic teaching is that imposing a penalty on an offender in proportion to their offense is permissible and just; but forgiving the offender is better. To go one step further by offering a favor to the offender is regarded the highest excellence. Muhammad (pbuh) said, *"The best among you are those who have the best manners and character"*. To the Muslims, the examples of moral virtues set by Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions serve as guidance both practically and theologically.

(I) Social Justice even in Warfare

Fighting is justified for legitimate self-defense, to aid other Muslims and after a violation in the terms of a treaty, but should be stopped if these circumstances cease to exist. The principle of forgiveness is reiterated in between the assertions of the right to self-defense.

During his life, Muhammad (pbuh) gave various injunctions to his forces and adopted practices toward the conduct of war. The most important of these were summarized by Muhammad's (pbuh) companion and first Caliph, Abu Bakr, in the form of ten rules for the Muslim army

O people! I charge you with ten rules; learn them well!

Stop, O people, that I may give you ten rules for your guidance in the battlefield. Do not commit treachery or deviate from the right path. You must not mutilate dead bodies. Neither kill a child, nor a woman, nor an aged man. Bring no harm to the trees, nor burn them with fire, especially those which are fruitful. Slay not any of the enemy's flock, save for your food. You are likely to pass by people who have devoted their lives to monastic services; leave them alone.

Commentators of the Qur'an agree that Muslims should always be willing and ready to negotiate peace with the other party without any hesitation. According to Maududi, Islam does not permit Muslims to reject peace and continue bloodshed. Islamic jurisprudence calls for third party interventions as another means of ending conflicts. Such interventions are to establish mediation between the two parties to achieve a just resolution of the dispute.¹

Conclusion

Hence the study meets the conclusion that Social Justice is fair behavior, equal treatment to each and everyone in all spheres of life from one's family to the global society. If a person receives something from society with the help of fellow beings, he becomes liable to them respectively. Islam produces a complete humanitarian concept of leading a just life which covers not merely following laws of administration under surveillance of government agencies but following laws of God in every walk of life from children, parents, relatives to animals, environment, common folk and government under the surveillance of Omniscient God. In every religion, we find the concept of the Day of Judgment, Islam also says that everyone in this world will be accountable of his worldly deeds before God on the Day of Resurrection. Qur'an says in chapter number 99; verse number 6-8, "That Day mankind will emerge



from many a direction to be shown their deeds! And whoever has done even an iota of good will see it reflected therein. And whosoever has done a iota of evil will see reflected therein. ” Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) says, “All of you are guardians (in trust of something or someone) and are accountable for your flock.” It means that every person who treats others as guardian for any duration of time will be accountable for his behavior with the subordinates whether as a parent, employer, master, officer, leader, minister or a king. Such concept of social justice promotes infallible peace and development of humanity irrespective of caste, creed, culture and community if implemented sincerely in any domain. In every walk of life, natural justice prevails without any discrimination when a person believes in his accountability hereafter. But in present time a Muslim in found guilty of deviating the path of social justice because his belief is not on the accountability hereafter. However it is fault of Muslims not of Islam that they do not follow the teachings of Qur’an and that of the Prophet (pbuh) in all walks of life otherwise the world itself will be a part of heaven in the sense of peace and prosperity.

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