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	The Qur'an Perspective on Human Rights and Social Justice
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The Qur'an Perspective on Human Rights and Social Justice

Abstract:

The discourse on human rights and social justice has increasingly become central in global debates, often framed through secular, Western-centric frameworks. However, the Qur'an, as the foundational text of Islam, provides a comprehensive moral, ethical, and legal framework that predates many modern articulations of human rights. This study critically examines Qur'an injunctions on human dignity, equality, justice, and collective responsibility, situating them in dialogue with contemporary human rights discourse. It highlights the Qur'an's recognition of universal human dignity (karma AL insane), the prohibition of exploitation and oppression, the emphasis on economic justice through mechanisms such as zakat and prohibition of rib (usury), and the protection of vulnerable groups including women, orphans, and minorities. The research also addresses interpretative challenges, particularly in reconciling traditional jurisprudence with evolving international norms. Through textual analysis and comparative frameworks, the study argues that the Qur'an paradigm offers a balanced vision where individual rights are harmonized with social obligations, and where justice is not only a legal construct but a spiritual and moral imperative. The findings underscore the relevance of Qur'an principles in shaping contemporary policies of governance, human rights advocacy, and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Qur'an, human rights, social justice, equality, dignity, Islamic ethics

Introduction:

The modern global discourse on human rights often traces its roots to Western political and philosophical traditions such as the Enlightenment, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the evolution of international law. However, this narrative frequently overlooks the profound ethical and legal frameworks embedded within religious traditions, particularly Islam. The Qur'an, revealed in the 7th century CE, articulated principles of justice, human dignity, and communal responsibility that resonate with, and in many respects surpass, contemporary notions of human rights. The Qur'an vision of justice is rooted in tawhid (the oneness of God) and the corresponding idea that all human beings are equal before the Creator. This theological foundation dismantles hierarchies based on race, gender, wealth, or status, affirming a universal dignity for all. Human rights in the Qur'an are not seen in isolation but are embedded within a web of duties and responsibilities: the right to life is tied to the prohibition of murder and injustice; the right to property is linked to obligations of zakat and prohibition of usury; the right to freedom is contextualized by the responsibility to avoid oppression. This article explores how the Qur'an approach to human rights and social justice can serve as a corrective to both the secularization of rights discourse and the misinterpretations of religious texts. It situates Qur'an injunctions within the broader framework of universal ethics while also acknowledging the challenges posed by contextual interpretations, cultural relativism, and the politicization of religious authority. By engaging both classical exegesis and contemporary scholarship, this study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how Qur'an principles can inform global conversations on justice, governance, and human welfare.

The Qur'an Foundation of Human Dignity:

The Qur'an establishes the principle of *karma al-insane* (human dignity) as a cornerstone of human existence. In Surah Al-Isa (17:70), Allah declares: "And we have certainly honored the children of Adam..." affirming that dignity is inherent and not contingent upon social status, ethnicity, or gender. This universality dismantles hierarchical structures prevalent in 7th-century Arabia and remains relevant to modern debates on racial and gender equality.

Equality before God: The Qur'an explicitly rejects superiority based on race or wealth, emphasizing instead piety and righteousness (*taw*) as the sole measure of worth (Surah AL Gujarat 49:13). **Gender equity:** Both men and women are equally responsible before God (Surah Al-Nail 16:97), challenging patriarchal interpretations that subordinate women.

Universal Rights: The Qur'an vision includes the right to life (Surah Al-Maida 5:32), protection of property (Surah Al-Banaras 2:188), and freedom of conscience (Surah AL Banaras 2:256). **Justice as a Central Qur'an Imperative:**

Justice (*ad and quits*) is among the most emphasized values in the Qur'an, regarded not only as a legal obligation but as a **divine command** tied directly to faith. The Qur'an repeatedly stresses that without justice, religious observance loses its moral legitimacy.

Qur'an as a Source of Justice:

Surah Al-Nia (4:135): "O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even if against yourselves, parents, or relatives..." — this verse illustrates impartiality, rejecting favoritism or bias.

Surah Al-Maida (5:8): "...do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness..." — demonstrating that justice is not conditional on personal emotions, alliances, or enmities.

Surah Al-Hasid (57:25): The Qur'an explicitly states that revelation and the prophets were sent so that "people may uphold justice." Thus, justice is the **purpose of divine law. Justice as both Legal and Spiritual:**

The Qur'an treats justice as a **dual reality:**

Legal/Institutional Justice — expressed through courts, fair economic systems, impartial governance, and equitable laws (4:58: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice...").

Spiritual/Moral Justice — inner self-discipline, fairness in everyday dealings, and alignment with divine will. Without moral integrity, legal systems risk corruption and hypocrisy.

Balancing Individual and Communal Rights:

Surah Al-Banaras (2:177): Righteousness is not limited to ritual worship but includes giving to relatives, orphans, the needy, and freeing captives, thus linking **personal piety with social justice**.

Individual rights are protected (e.g., right to life 5:32, right to property 2:188), but always balanced with duties to society.

The Qur'an rejects **selfish individualism**; freedom is meaningful only when exercised without harming others.

Justice as a Universal Value:

The Qur'an makes justice binding not only on Muslims but as a **universal human principle**. Justice toward non-Muslims and adversaries (60:8) reflects this universality.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared in his Farewell Sermon: "All mankind is from Adam and Eve... an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab..." — grounding social justice in human equality.

Practical Implications:

Governance: Justice must guide state institutions, free from corruption, nepotism, and discrimination.

Economy: Fair wages, prohibition of exploitation (83:1–3), and social redistribution (zakat, waif).

Conflict Resolution: Reconciliation (such) should prioritize fairness, not only political convenience (49:9).

Judiciary: Impartiality, transparency, and accountability are Qur'an imperatives for judges and leaders.

Economic and Social Rights in the Qur'an:

The Qur'an does not restrict itself to abstract spiritual ideals but offers **practical mechanisms for justice in the economic and social sphere**. These rights are central to human dignity and to the Qur'an vision of a just society.

Right to Sustenance and Livelihood:

The Qur'an affirms that **sustenance is guaranteed by God**: "And there is no creature on earth but that upon Allah is its provision..." (Surah Had 11:6).

Poverty and hunger are not seen as natural states to be tolerated but as **conditions society is morally obliged to alleviate**.

Economic rights are tied to justice: "Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly..." (Surah Al-Banaras 2:188).

Implication: Every human being has the right to access food, clothing, shelter, and opportunities for livelihood — making social welfare a Qur'an duty, not merely charity.

Prohibition of Exploitation:

The Qur'an strongly condemns unjust economic practices:

Fraud and cheating: "Woe to those who give less [than due], who, when they take a measure from people, take in full; but if they give by measure or weight to them, they cause loss." (Surah Al-Mutaffifin 83:1–3).

Hoarding of wealth: "And those who hoard gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah – give them tidings of a painful punishment." (Surah Al-Taw bah 9:34–35).

Oppression of workers: Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) echoed Qur'an principles by commanding fair wages and forbidding exploitation of laborers. **Mechanisms of Social Justice:**

Zakat (Obligatory Almsgiving)

One of the five pillars of Islam; mentioned alongside prayer in more than 30 verses (e.g., Surah Al-Banaras 2:177, 2:110).

Functions as an **institutional redistribution system**, ensuring that wealth circulates and poverty is reduced.

Beneficiaries specified in Surah Al-Taw bah (9:60): poor, needy, debtors, captives, travelers, those working to collect zakat, new Muslims, and for the cause of Allah. **Waif (Charitable Endowment):**

Though not explicitly in the Qur'an, the **waif system** was derived from prophetic practice and Qur'an values of charity and social solidarity.

Historically, waif institutions provided **education, healthcare, water supply, and welfare services** in Muslim societies, embodying the Qur'an ethos of ad (justice) and insane (benevolence).

Prohibition of Rib (Usury/Interest):

Explicitly condemned in Surah Al-Banaras (2:275–279), where Allah declares war on those who persist in usury.

Rib is seen as an exploitative system that **concentrates wealth, increases inequality, and burdens the poor.**

Instead, the Qur'an promotes risk-sharing trade, fair contracts, and charity-based finance.

Protection of Vulnerable Groups:

The Qur'an repeatedly prioritizes **those most at risk of marginalization:**

Orphans: “Do not approach the property of the orphan except in a way that is best until he reaches maturity...” (Surah Al-An ‘am 6:152).

The Poor and Needy: Condemns neglect of the poor (Surah Al-Maun 107:1–3), and encourages generosity without arrogance (Surah Al-Banaras 2:263).

Women: Commands just treatment, fair dowry, inheritance rights, and protection from exploitation (Surah Al-Nia 4:7, 4:19).

Minorities/Outsiders: The Qur'an obliges kindness to neighbors, travelers, and strangers (Surah Al-Nia 4:36).

Contemporary Relevance:

Social Safety Nets: Modern Muslim-majority states can institutionalize zakat and waif as part of welfare systems, ensuring healthcare, housing, and education access.

Ethical Finance: Prohibition of rib inspires Islamic finance models based on equity, profitsharing, and risk distribution, offering alternatives to exploitative debt structures.

Scholarly note: While classical jurists debated apostasy, the Qur'an itself does not stipulate a temporal punishment; it describes apostasy as a grave sin with eschatological consequences (4:137; 3:86–91). Many contemporary scholars distinguish **private belief change** from **political treason**, arguing for freedom of belief within public-order limits.

Treatment of non-Muslims under Islamic governance:

Medina Charter (622 CE): A constitutional precedent where Muslims and Jewish tribes formed one political community (amah whydah) with mutual defense and distinct religious laws.

Ethics toward non-combatants (60:8–9): Kindness and justice to those who do not fight you for your religion; hostility is restricted to active aggression.

Everyday social bonds (5:5): Lawful food and intermarriage with People of the Book reflect social proximity, not segregation.

Modern framing: Moving from **pre-modern “dharma” categories** to **equal citizenship**, guided by Qur'an justice and treaty ethics, supports minority rights in contemporary states (due process, political participation, protection from discrimination).

Gender equality debates in Qur'an interpretation:

Equal moral agency & spiritual worth: 33:35; 16:97; 9:71 (men and women are mutual allies in enjoining good).

Contested verses & contextualization:

Qiwamah (4:34): Often read as male “authority”; contemporary masjid- and context-based readings emphasize responsibility/provision, not superiority.

Inheritance (4:11–12) & testimony (2:282): Interpreted in light of historical economic roles; modern juristic discourse explores context-sensitive applications while preserving justice and welfare.

Procedural protections: Marriage, mar, hull (initiated divorce), and bans on harm (4:19) create a rights-and-duties framework.

Comparative Perspectives: Qur'an and International Human Rights:

Convergences and divergences with UDHR & international law Convergences:

Human dignity & equality: 17:70; 49:13 ↔ UDHR Arts. 1–2.

Right to life & due process: 5:32; 4:58, 4:135 ↔ protections against arbitrary killing and demands for justice.

Apostasy/blasphemy: Qur'an stresses freedom and eschatological accountability; some later legal schools prescribe temporal penalties via hadith-based statecraft—an area of robust contemporary reform discourse.

Family law differentials: Inheritance/Shahid rules historically gender-differentiated; modern reforms seek outcomes aligned with **masjid** (justice, welfare, dignity).

Criminal sanctions (hooded): Classical codifications vs. modern standards on proportionality, evidentiary thresholds, and prevention-first policies.

Islamic perspectives on collective rights vs. individualism:

Collective moral mandate: 3:104; 9:71—society must promote good, prevent harm (mare/muncher).

Public interest (masala) & harm principle (law radar): Community welfare can shape policy (markets, health, environment) while safeguarding personal rights.

Shure (42:38): Participatory decision-making is a Qur'an value, compatible with consultative/democratic institutions. **Balance:** Islam envisions **mutual reinforcement**—individual rights flourish within a just, virtue-seeking community. **Critiques of Western-centric human rights models:**

Cultural embeddedness: Claims of “neutral universality” can mask Western historical experiences; Islam foregrounds **theocentric ethics** and **duties** alongside rights.

Materialist reduction: Secular frameworks may underweight spiritual/moral goods central to human flourishing in Islam.

Response: Articulating **Islamic universalism**—dignity, justice, and compassion grounded in revelation—can enrich global rights discourse rather than reject it. Regional charters (e.g., Cairo 1990; Arab Charter) show attempts—varying in quality—to integrate both.

Contemporary Relevance and Challenges:

Misinterpretations and misuse of Qur'an texts:

Text without context: Extracting verses from legal/ethical horizons leads to extremes (e.g., on war, gender).

Politics over piety: Weaponizing scripture for factional goals erodes trust and violates justice (5:8; 4:135).

Scholarly remedy: Usual al-fish tools (occasion of revelation, objectives, masjid, language analysis) and cross-verse synthesis.

Reconciling Qur'an principles with modern governance:

Rule of law & accountability: 4:58 (trusts to their people; judge with justice), independent judiciary, anti-corruption.

Social safety nets: Strong zakat/waif ecosystems, ethical finance (anti-rib logic → financial inclusion, anti-predatory lending).

Policy implications: education, law, peacebuilding:

Education:

Integrate Qur'an human-rights ethics into curricula (dignity, justice, stewardship). Train imams/teachers in conflict resolution, gender justice, and rights literacy.

Law & institutions:

Codify anti-discrimination; protect worship spaces (22:40).

Family-law review via **masjid** to ensure fairness and welfare.

Financial regulation curbing exploitative lending; empower zakat/waif for poverty alleviation.

Peacebuilding:

Use **lush** (reconciliation), **isle** (repair), **amen** (safe-conduct) practices in mediation.

Interfaith councils grounded in 3:64 ("come to a common word"), community policing against hate crimes, and restorative justice mechanisms.

THE QUR'AN PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Equality and
Non-Discrimination

Justice and Fairness

Compassion and
Mercy

Protecting the
Vulnerable

Upholding Dignity

Summary:

The Qur'an presents a profound and holistic vision of **human rights and social justice**, one that predates and, in many ways, complements modern frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Central to this vision is the recognition of **karma AL insane** (human dignity), a universal right bestowed upon all humans regardless of race, gender, wealth, or creed (Qur'an 17:70). The Qur'an dismantles social hierarchies by emphasizing equality before God, highlighting that righteousness (**taw**), not social status, is the true measure of worth (49:13). Justice (**ad and quits**) lies at the heart of Qur'an ethics. It is not limited to courts or governance but extends to spiritual and moral self-regulation. Believers are commanded to uphold justice even against themselves or kin (4:135), and fairness must be maintained even in conflict (5:8). The Qur'an views justice as the central purpose of revelation and prophetic missions (57:25). This establishes a dual model: **legal justice** (laws, governance, and economic regulation) and **spiritual justice** (moral fairness,

honesty, integrity). Economic and social rights are directly embedded in Qur'an injunctions. Sustenance is considered a divine guarantee (11:6), and exploitation is strongly prohibited (83:1–3, 9:34). Mechanisms such as **zakat** institutionalize wealth redistribution, while **waif** historically provided education, healthcare, and social welfare. The prohibition of **rib** (usury, 2:275–279) protects the poor from exploitation and promotes equity-based financial systems. Vulnerable groups — orphans, the poor, women, and minorities — are repeatedly emphasized as deserving protection, dignity, and rights. The Qur'an also safeguards **freedom of religion**: “There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256), and diversity in faith is described as part of divine will (11:118). NonMuslims are entitled to justice, kindness, and protection (60:8–9), reflecting the inclusive model of the Medina Charter. Gender equality remains a debated subject, yet the Qur'an affirms the spiritual and moral equality of men and women (33:35, 16:97), while later jurisprudential debates on inheritance, testimony, and authority invite contextual re-readings guided by Qur'an objectives (masjid). In comparing Qur'an principles with the UDHR, significant convergences emerge: dignity, equality, justice, freedom of conscience, and socio-economic rights. However, divergences exist in areas shaped more by historical jurisprudence than by the Qur'an itself, such as apostasy, blasphemy, and some family law rules. Unlike secular rights discourse, the Qur'an emphasizes not only **rights** but also **responsibilities**, situating human freedom within a moral framework. Contemporary challenges include **misinterpretations and political misuse of Qur'an texts**, tensions between traditional jurisprudence and modern governance, and global critiques of Western-centric human rights. Yet the Qur'an paradigm provides a foundation for developing policies on education, governance, economic justice, and peacebuilding. By combining universal dignity with spiritual accountability, the Qur'an offers a vision of human rights that is both transcendent and practical, capable of enriching modern human rights discourse while remaining rooted in divine revelation.

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