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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POVERTY IN MUSLIM WORLD

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Concept of Social Justice in Islam: Comprehending the Qur'ānic injunction and Prophetic Traditions on Social Justice

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Abstract: Justice being the operational key concept of Islamic social order, whether; it will be divine, natural, social or rational, ordains its adherents to promote peace and communal harmony on earth. The concept of justice has got always the prime importance in Islamic social order and Islam offers and dispenses very required concept of it. Man being social in character cannot live in isolation. He needs attention, aid and support of innumerable individuals to meet his needs. The clubbing of men into tribes, states and nations broadens the horizons of the multiple problems he has to face and the love of wealth, power and something else make them violent and complex (*Al Qur'ān*, 100:8; 17:100). The term justice as we know and understand can be equated to the concept of 'Adl, Qiṣṭ or Mīzan as used in the Qur'ān. These terms are the opposite of Ẓ ulm or injustice.

This paper is a humble attempt to highlight the concept the social justice in the light of Qur'ānic injections and prophetic traditions and also the stance of the classical Muslims scholars on this issue will be highlighted.

Keywords: ??????????????????????

Introduction

Justice which is being commonly used as a translationof the Arabic word '*Adl* or its synonyms. The literal meaning of *'Adl* in classical Arabic is thus a combination of moral and social values denoting fairness, balance, temperance and straightforwardness (Khadduri 1984, pp. 6-8). Epistemologically *'Adl* means "a balanced approach to all things including life" (Barazangi, 1996, p. 19). The meaning of justice in the *Qur'ān* is linked to the concept of "balance" and "measure" both in the action of God and humanity (Leaman, 2006, p. 13). As already mentioned *'Adl* has many synonyms and one among them is *Qist* meaning how we deal with one another in the affairs of this world (*Al-Qur'ān*: 55:9). Social justice means giving eachand every individual his due share what they deserve. *Qist*, then, is social justice in its broader sense first in our relationship to Allah and second in our relationship to society. More than *'Adl*, *Qist*

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relates specifically to social relations among human beings. *Qist* means acting fairly with others (Barazangi, 1996, p. 19). As Allah says in the holy *Qur'ān*:

> "Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just." (Al-Qur'ān; 60:8)

Concept of Justice in Pre-Islamic Era

When we talk of the world before the emergence of Islam, the scenario was different. The vices were treated as prime virtues. In *jāhilīyyah* society of Arabia, where endurance was perhaps the primary concern of tribesmen's, virtues like honour, courage, and liberality were more highly prized than other virtues. These virtues were denoted by the term '*Murawah*', consisting of everything that was taken to be praiseworthy and which may be called the Arab "*summumbonum*". This embodiment of virtues continued to be viewed so high in the Arab eyes that no one could claim to be just without these virtues. The absence of consistent social order and lack of political unity in the tribal society of Arabia inevitably overpowered the level of justice to the requirement of survival, and subsequently the appeal to justice took the negative form of retribution such as retaliation and payment (Khadduri1984, p. 9)

Religion and Society in Islam

All the things created by the absolute one, is a unit comprising of different parts. It has a same origin, a common purpose, because it was deliberately produced by a single, absolute and comprehensive will. The relation between the creator and His creation is to be found in the power of the word, the active will from which all creation came when Allah says "Verily, when He intends a thing, His Command is, *"be", and it is* (Al-*Qur'ān*; 36:82). Man being part of this universe is himself dependent upon and related to all the other parts. Likewise, humanity is an essential unity and its all scattered parts must be brought together,its diversity must give place to uniformity. There must be no distinction between men on the grounds of cast, colour, creed and these things must not become a dividing factor among us (Kotb 1953, pp. 17-20). Allah says in the *Qur'ān*:

> "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (Al-Qur'ān:49:13).

Narrated by An-Nu'mān bin Bashir: Allah's Messenger said, "You see the believers as regards their being merciful among themselves, showing love among themselves, and

being kind among themselves, resembling one body, so that, if any part of the body is not well then the whole body shares the sleeplessness (insomnia) and fever with it." (Shahi Bukhari, Hadith No: 6011)

Man is a social being and cannot live in an isolation he needs to live in a dependent manner and until this integration and unification has taken place, there can be no undeviating or stable system in human life. This unification of humankind will make them the well wishers of one another and would bring back those who have strayed from the right path (Kotb 1953, p. 21). Allah testifies this thing by saying:

> "Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour: fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment." (Al-Qur'ān; 5:2)

In the chapter 3 verse 18 of the holy *Qur'ān* Allah says that:

> "There is no god but He: That is the witness of Allah, His angels, and those endued with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Power, the Wise."

In this verse Allah testifies, He created a fair and balanced world, a world which has no flaws, where everything is working on His command and on the same pattern has laid down certain obligations for mankind, so that the peace and tranquillity may prevails in the society and to maximise the harmony between other creation and humanity (Barazangi, 1996, pp. 22-23).

Social Justice in Islam

While illustrating the concept of social justice in a detailed way, S. Qutb opines that, one must first examine the Islamic theory of universe, life and humankind to gain a clear understanding of the nature of social justice in Islam. "For social justice is only a branch of that great science to which all Islamic studies must refer." (kutb 1956, p. 17)

Qist or *'Adl* is the opposite of *Zulm* or injustice. History bears witness to the fact, that Islam offers and dispenses the very required concept of justice. Islam is a religion made up in essentials of a revelation and represents the actual expression of the divine will. It is the religion good and valid for all times to come. Its doctrines are given in the *Qur'ān* and *Hadith*. As regards others we have to rely on the principles or concept as can be gathered from*Qur'ān* and *Hadith* and chart our course on the basis of *Ijtihād*, *'ijmā*, *qiyās* (Mannan2005, pp. 33-36). Allah says in the holy *Qur'ān*;

> "Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in Faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend." (Al-Qur'ān; 4:125)

Islam is religion, where all means of life whether it is temporal or spiritual have to go altogether hand in hand. It is a system where politics is a part of religion and social

values are also the religious values. Islam recognised no difference between worldly zeal and religious coercion (Kotb 1956, P. 7). Syed Qutb in his book *Social Justice in Islam* talks about nature Islam and says:

> Such was the birth of Islam and such its task; so it was not liable to be isolated in human idealism far removed from practical worldly life; nor was it compelled to narrow the circle of its action out of fear from an empire or a monarch. For the centre of its being and the field of its action is human life in its entirety, spiritual and material, religious and worldly. Such a religion cannot continue to exist in isolation from society, nor can its adherents be true Muslims unless they practice their faith in their social, legal and economic relationships. And a society cannot be Islamic if it expels the civil and religious law of Islam from its codes and customs, so that nothing of Islam is left except rites and ceremonials (Kotb 1956, p. 8).

When Islam came into existence, Prophet Muhammad at the first instance felt a dire need to assert religious and moral values in the lives of the companions who have accepted the newly revealed faith, so that, they are just and fair in their affairs with the other creations. History bears witness to this fact that it was Islam which transformed the society of those individuals who were in the slumbers of vices, into a class to whom Allah says "*Allah well pleased with them, and they with Him*" (*Al-Qur'ān*; 98:8). In the *Qur'ān* and *Ahadith* of prophet Muhammad you will find that believers are time and again warned against bigotry and oppression, and admonished them that in the fulfilment of their religious obligations they must above all be just (Khadduri 1984, p. 10). Allah says in the Qur'ān:

> "We sent a foretime our messengers with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of Right and Wrong), that men may stand forth in justice." (Al-Qur'ān; 57:25)

Second only to the existence of God, In the *Qur'ān* and *Ahadith*, no other religious or moral principles are more emphasised than the principles of uprightness, equity, and temperance, to some extent because of their fundamentalimportance but predominantly because of the reaction against the pre-Islamic social order which paid little or no attention to justice. (Khadduri 1984,p. 10)

Syed Qutb, while discussing the concept social justice in Islam writes:

> However, we approach the question there can be no shadow of doubt that the theory of society is obviously reflected in the beliefs and the customs of this religion, and that these latter represent the basic, powerful, and universal theory of all social life. So if in any age we find a desire to over emphasise the pietistic aspect of this faith and to divorce it form the social aspects, or to divorce the social aspect from it, it will be the fault of that age rather than of Islam. Islam does not prescribe worship as the only basis of its belief, but rather it reckons all the activities of life as comprehending worship in themselves, so long they are in the bounds of consciousness, goodness and honesty. (Kutb 1956,pp. 8-9)

Islam is a religion where the welfare of others is being is of prime importance. There are many examples in the *Qur'ān* and the *Ahadith* of the Prophet Muhammad that Islam and social justice are so compatible with each other that, Islam laid its foundation of an ideal society "Madinan Society" on the basis of mutual brotherhood which in the history of world was first of its kind and that event is famously known as "*Muwakha*" (brotherhood). Narrated by Ibn 'Umar Allah's Messenger said, "*Jibrai'l* (Gabriel) kept on recommending me about treating the neighbours kindly and politely, so much so that I thought that he would order me to make them as my heirs." (Shahih Bukhari, *Hadith*. No 6015)

Islam prescribes the basic principles of social justice and establishes the claim of poor to the wealth of rich example of which is given in the Qur'ān. Allah says:

"and establish regular Prayer and give regular Charity; and loan to Allah a Beautiful Loan." (Al-Qur'ān; 73:20)

Narrated by Abu Musa Al-'Ash'ari, the Prophet Muhammad, said, "On every Muslim there is enjoined (a compulsory) *Sadaqa* (alms). "They (the people) asked, "If one has nothing?" He said, "He should work with his hands so that he may benefit himself and give it in charity... (Shahih Bukhari, *Hadith*. No: 6022)

Islam lays down a just principle for power and money and therefore has no need to drug the minds of men, and summon them to neglect their earthly rights in favour of their expectations in heaven. And on the contrary it warns those who abdicate their natural rights and they will be severely punished in the next world, and it calls them. (Kotb 1956, p. 22). Narrated by Jarir bin 'Abdullah: The Prophet said, "He who is not merciful to others, will not be treated mercifully." (Shahih Bukhari, *Hadith* No. 6013)

At this point, it can be said that social justice in Islam is not merely limited to economic aspects of human life but includes all aspects of human life, based on faith in God. According to S. Qutb, "there are three foundation s on which Islam establishes justice:

1. Absolute freedom of conscience.

2. The complete equality of men

3. The permanent mutual responsibility of the society. (Kotb 1956, p. 30)

While discussing these three fundamental foundations of social justice S. Qutb, points out that complete social justice cannot be assured, nor can its efficiency and permanence be guaranteed, unless it arises from an inner conviction of the spirit; it must be claimed by the individual, it must be needed by society, there must be a belief that it will serve the highest purpose of mankind. Without such complete freedom human nature cannot prevail against the force of humiliation and submissiveness and servility. This freedom is therefore, one of the corner-stones for the building of social justice

in Islam (Kotb 1956, pp. 30-44). Islam deals with every aspect of human life, whether; it is spiritual or social alike, so that the concept of equality may be firmly established. There was no need for it so to do; for it treats of equality verbally and legally only after it had established in fact and spirit, when the complete freedom of the conscience from all artificial value, from all outward appearances, and from all material necessities has been acquired, Islam itself guarantees the equality in its true sense both verbally and legally. Islam has an intense passion for equality; it demands that it be universal and complete, not limited to one race or one nation, to one house or one city. Similarly it demands that equality embraces a wider sphere than merely the economic, to which the material teachings of west have confined it (Kotb 1956, pp. 44-55).After the duo are implemented in their true spirit and form, Islam legislates for mutual responsibility insociety in all shapes and forms. Islam lays down a complete liberty for the individual, within limits which will not injure him and will not favour society at his expense. It safeguards the rights of society, and at the same time specifies its responsibilities on the other side of the balance. Thus it enables life to progress on a level and even path, and to attain to the highest ends which can be served by the individual and by society alike. (Kotb 1953, pp. 44-68)

Islam, being an ideal, last and religion of nature, understands that Allah created all human beings with varying gifts, as their bodies differ in many ways as biologically proved. Their environmental, cultural circumstances and their hereditary gains also differ. In this situation, how come it is possible thateconomic equality is ensured? Thus the existence of economic inequalities among the human beings is but natural. It is also there because Islam guarantees every human being the right to take individual initiative in earning wealth and gives right of private ownership of property to them (Kotb 1953, pp. 69-74). Moreover, existence of inequalities in economic and social life is a part of Divine scheme whereby God tests and tries the people to know who are good and who are bad. To this fact, the Holy Qur'an refers when it says:

> "It is He Who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks, some above others: that He may try you in the gifts He hath given you: for thy Lord is quick in punishment: yet He is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful" (Al-Qur'ān; 6: 165); (Al-Qur'ān; 16: 71).

Narrated by Sahal ibn S'ad, the Prophet Muhammad said, "I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him, will be in Paradise like this, putting his index and middle fingers together." (Sahih Bukhari, *Hadith*. No. 6005)

However, despite recognising inequalities as natural and part of Divine world order, Islam permits differences in wealth within reasonable limits only. It does not tolerate that these differences should grow so wide that some people live their life in absolute luxury while millions are left to lead a life of abject poverty and misery. Allah says in the Qur'ān:

> "Give unto orphans their wealth. Exchange not the good for the bad (in your management thereof) nor absorb their wealth into your own wealth. Lo! that would be a great sin."(Al-Qur'an; 4:2).

Islam does not believe in equal distribution of economic resources and wealth among the people rather it believes in equitable, just and fair distribution. Allah says:

> "Come not nigh to the orphan's property except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength; and fulfil (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning)." (Al-Qur'an; 17:34)

It bridges the gap between the rich and the poor by taking very effective measures to modify the distribution of wealth in favour of the poor. Islam, on the one hand, ensures just and equitable distribution of wealth among the people and, on the other hand, provides social security to the poor and the destitute in the form of basic necessities of life. Allah says:

> "The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and those who collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled and to free the captives and the debtors, and for the cause of Allah, and (for) the wayfarers; a duty imposed by Allah. Allah is Knower, Wise." (Al-Qur'an; 9:60)

Besides that, Islam also protects the weak from the economic exploitation by the strong. Allah says in the holy Qur'ān

> "And in whose wealth there is a right acknowledged. For the beggar and the destitute;" (Al-Qur'an; 70:24-25).

Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that: "Abu Hurairah narrates that the Messenger of Allah said: One who strives for the widows and the poor is like one who fights in the way of Allah (Shahi Bukhari, Hadith. No. 6006).

Conclusion

Our social situation is as bad as it can be, because we are not just in our social affairs, and we try to solve our problems with the given solutions of West, which to our naked eye looks a problem solving solution but the truth is that it makes them more complex. The Islamic concept of social justice guarantees justice in all aspects of human affairs, political systems, social relations, and economic foundations. Islam through its just system ensures peace tranquillity, harmony in the society. It is Islam which commands its believers to be fair enough in all affairs of the life (*Al-Qur'ān*; 83:1-3). Be good with parents, spouses, children, neighbours, and even with other living things. It is the goodness of Islam which came to free humankind from the stranglehold of irreligiousness and unjust matters of the society.

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