

Social Justice and Equality in Pakistani Society: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the various complex aspects of social justice and equality within the distinct societal context of Pakistan, with a focus on incorporating an Islamic perspective. This study examines how fundamental Islamic principles manifest inside the framework of Pakistani society, exerting an impact on social frameworks, policies, and day-to-day engagements. Also, it looks at historical examples within Islamic organizations that exemplify the manifestation of social justice and equality in government and social welfare. The strategies employed by Pakistan to address social difficulties through legal reforms, economic policies, and public awareness while maintaining a strong connection to its Islamic past are also explored. The primary areas of emphasis encompass the advancement of gender parity within the confines of delineated societal functions, the equitable allocation of resources via mechanisms like zakat, and the safeguarding of the rights of marginalized groups. Moreover, the study investigates methods for augmenting interfaith concordance and fortifying the legal structure to protect social justice and parity.

Keywords: *Social Justice, Equality, Islamic perspective, Quran, Hadith*

Introduction

Pakistan presents an intriguing framework to examine the complex interaction between religious precepts and socio-economic factors. Social justice and equality hold significant importance in Islam, as they underscore the values of fairness, compassion, and the right allocation of

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resources and opportunities throughout society². The concepts of justice, equality, and compassion are emphasised in Islamic teachings, as documented in the Quran and Hadith. The Rashidun Caliphate, Ottoman Empire, and Mughal Empire are recognised as significant illustrations of Islamic states that adhered to these values. These concepts retain considerable significance in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, where the predominant religious affiliation is Islam³. The current state of Pakistan is characterised by a multifaceted environment, with several obstacles to economic imbalances, gender disparities, minority rights, and corrupt practices⁴. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the significant influence of an Islamic perspective on the discussion around social justice and equality within Pakistani culture. This statement highlights the capacity of Islamic teachings to steer Pakistan towards a future characterised by greater fairness and equality. It emphasises the ability of individuals from diverse backgrounds to experience the advantages of justice, compassion, and opportunity in alignment with the fundamental principles of Islam.

The Concept of Social Justice in Islam

Principles of Social Justice in the Islamic Context

Within the Islamic framework, the ideas about social justice find their origins firmly entrenched in the Holy Quran and Sunnah, encompassing

² Muhammad, Yaar, and Peter Brett. "Addressing social justice and cultural identity in Pakistani education: A qualitative content analysis of curriculum policy." *Education, ethnicity and equity in the multilingual asian context* (2019): 235-253.

³ Abdullah, Nauman Ahmed, and Abdul Chaudhry. "Promoting social justice and equity through university education in Pakistan." *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 12, no. 2 (2018): 5.

⁴ Syed, Jawad. "Pakistani model of diversity management: rediscovering Jinnah's vision." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 28, no. 3/4 (2008): 100-113.

the teachings and practises of Prophet Muhammad. The doctrine of equality before the law, as elucidated in the Quran (5:8)⁵, underscores the imperative of fair treatment for all individuals, irrespective of their societal standing, financial resources, or personal history.

Al-Quran 5:8

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا قَوِّمِينَ لِلّٰهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ ۚ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ
أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۗ اَعْدِلُوا هُوَ اَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوٰى ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ خَبِيْرٌۢ بِمَا تَعْمَلُوْنَ ۙ ۸

**Oh believers! Stand firm for Allah and testify honestly.
Do not let people's animosity cause injustice. Be fair!
That's more right. Be watchful of Allah. Your actions are
known to Allah.**

This concept finds support in the Hadith, whereby the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ articulated,

**"The individuals possess an equality akin to the teeth of
a comb."**⁶

Another fundamental value that can be observed is the equitable distribution of wealth, as demonstrated through the required practise of zakat, which involves donating alms. The significance of wealth redistribution from the rich to the less fortunate, as well as the promotion of economic justice and poverty alleviation, is emphasised in the Quran (2:267-273)⁷.

Al-Quran (2:276-263)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اَنْفِقُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَمِمَّا اَخْرَجْنَا لَكُمْ مِنَ الْاَرْضِ ۗ وَلَا
تَيَمَّمُوا الْخَبِيْثَ مِنْهُ تُنْفِقُوْنَ وَاَسْتُمْ بِاِخْذِيْهِ اِلَّا اَنْ تُعْمِضُوْا فِيْهِ ۗ وَاَعْلَمُوْا اَنَّ اللّٰهَ
عَلِيْمٌۢ حَمِيْدٌ ۙ ۲۶۷

⁵ Al-Quran 5:8

⁶ Related by Abu Hatem-ar-Razi, in his 'Ilal al Hadith, and others

⁷ Al-Quran (2:276-263)

الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُم بِالْفَحْشَاءِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُم مَّغْفِرَةً مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلًا ۗ وَاللَّهُ
وَسِعَ عَلِيمٌ ۚ ٢٦٨

يُوتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَن يَشَاءُ ۚ وَمَن يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا ۗ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا
أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ٢٦٩

وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِّنْ نَّفَقَةٍ أَوْ نَذَرْتُمْ مِّنْ نَّذْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُهُ ۗ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ
٢٧٠

إِن تَبَدَّلُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ ۗ وَإِن تُخْفُوهَا وَتُوتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ۗ
وَيَقْبُرْ عَنْكُم مِّن سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ٢٧١

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَا تُنْفِسْكُمْ ۗ وَمَا
تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ ٢٧٢
يَحْسَبُهُمُ الْأَرْضُ فِي ضَرْبًا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ لَا إِلَهَ سِوَالِ اللَّهِ فِي أَحْصَرُوا الَّذِينَ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ
تُنْفِقُوا وَمَا ۗ الْخَافِ النَّاسَ يَسْأَلُونَ لَا بِسِيمَلَهُمْ تَعْرِفُهُمُ التَّعَفُّفِ مِنَ الْغَنِيَاءِ الْجَاهِلِ
٢٧٣ عَلِيمٌ بِهِ اللَّهُ فَإِنَّ خَيْرٌ مِنْ

Oh, believers! Donate the best of your earnings and what We harvested from the earth. Do not donate worthless items you would only take with closed eyes. And praise Allah, the Self-Sufficient. While the Devil tempts you to be stingy and poor, Allah promises forgiveness and many blessings. Allah is abundant and wise. Whoever He chooses gets wisdom. Wisdom is a great privilege. However, only rational people will notice this. Allah knows your donations and vows. And those who do wrong will have no one to help them. Giving publicly is fine, but giving privately to the poor will forgive your sins. Your actions are known to Allah. You are not responsible for guiding others, O Prophet – Allah guides whom He wills. If you give to Allah for his pleasure, your philanthropy is for your good. You will get back everything you provide and won't be hurt. The

charity serves those who are too occupied with their faith to work. Because they don't beg, strangers will think they don't need charity. They're recognisable by appearance. They don't get stubborn. Allah knows your charitable giving.

Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on safeguarding individual rights, which includes the protection of property rights, the right to a fair trial, and the right to be treated with decency and respect. The sanctity of human dignity is asserted in the Quran⁸.

Al-Quran 17:70

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ
عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا ۝ ۷۰

In fact, We have raised the status of Adam's children, brought them on water and land, given them good and safe food, and given them more rights than many of Our other beings.

Ultimately, the concepts of compassion and mercy are fundamental and all-encompassing, as evidenced by the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad exemplifies the significance of empathy, kindness, and mercy in the interactions with all individuals within a society, hence cultivating an atmosphere conducive to societal harmony and justice. These concepts jointly establish the fundamental basis of social justice within the Islamic framework, guiding Muslims in their endeavour to create a fair and equitable society⁹.

⁸ Al-Quran 17:70

⁹ Syed, Jawad, Mustafa Özbilgin, Dilek Torunoglu, and Faiza Ali. "Rescuing gender equality from the false dichotomies of secularism versus shariah in Muslim majority countries." In *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 67-79. Pergamon, 2009.

Throughout Islamic history, many empires and states have enacted social justice initiatives, thereby exemplifying the values delineated in Islamic teachings. Prominent instances encompass the policies implemented by the Rashidun Caliphate under the tenure of Caliphs Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali. These policies focused on social welfare, legal justice, and the equitable distribution of wealth. In a similar vein, the Ottoman and Mughal empires established judicial and social welfare frameworks that were rooted in Islamic tenets¹⁰.

Equality in Islamic society is a topic of significant scholarly interest. It is essential to examine Islam's principles and teachings to understand how equality is seen and practised within this religious framework. Islam advocates for gender equality, albeit within the delineated duties and responsibilities assigned to males and females. Although there are distinct societal responsibilities for men and women, Islam enforces the principle of equitable treatment, ensuring equal rights, dignity, and opportunities for education and employment for all genders. The annals of Islamic history encompass notable instances of esteemed female scholars, businesswomen, and leaders who made substantial contributions to their societies¹¹. In the Quran, Allah says¹²:

All-Quran 49:13

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَىٰكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ۝ ١٣

O people! In fact, We made you from a man and a woman and divided you into populations and groups so that you could "get to know" each other. In Allah's eyes,

¹⁰ Seniawski, Barbara L. "Riba today: Social equity, the economy, and doing business under Islamic law." *Colum. J. Transnat'l L.* 39 (2000): 701.

¹¹ Bano, Samia. "Islamic family arbitration, justice and human rights in Britain." *Law, Social Justice & Global Development* 1, no. 11 (2007).

¹² All-Quran 49:13

the worthiest of you is the most virtuous of you. Allah really knows and sees everything.

Also, in the last sermon¹³ delivered by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, He expressed the belief that:

The entirety of humanity traces its origins back to Adam and Eve. There is no inherent superiority of an Arab individual over a non-Arab, nor is there any intrinsic superiority of a non-Arab over an Arab. Similarly, there is no inherent superiority of a white person over a black person, nor is there any innate superiority of a black person over a white person. The only basis for power among individuals is their purity and adherence to virtuous actions.

Islam also advocates for racial and ethnic equality, denouncing the ideologies of racism and tribalism. As established above, the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ last sermon underlined the equality of all Muslims, regardless of their ethnic heritage.

Al-Quran 33:35

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَشِيعِينَ وَالْخَشِيعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا ٣٥

Surely 'for' Muslim men and women, believing men and women, devout men and women, truthful men and women, patient men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, men and women who guard their chastity, and

¹³ Farooq, Mohammad Omar. "The farewell sermon of prophet Muhammad: An analytical review." *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 9, no. 3 (2018): 322-342.

men and women who remember Allah often – for `all of` them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also emphasised the concept of brotherhood among all who identify as Muslims. According to his statement,

A collective unity exists among the believers, wherein they exhibit a sense of interconnectedness like that of a single entity. This unity is characterised by mutual affection, benevolence, and empathy towards one another. When a certain region of the human body experiences distress, the entire body exhibits physiological responses such as insomnia and elevated body temperature.

Prayer in the Islamic faith involves individuals standing in unity, disregarding socioeconomic rank or race distinctions. This practice serves as a symbolic representation of the concept of equality in the presence of God.

Economic egalitarianism is fostered through various techniques, such as the proscription of usury (riba) and the advancement of philanthropic endeavours. The primary objective of these principles is to mitigate wealth accumulation among a select few individuals and promote a fairer allocation of resources.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) advocated for philanthropy and assisting others in need, irrespective of their societal or personal circumstances. He expressed the following sentiment:

"It is imperative to promptly assist those in need while discouraging rich people from delaying their contributions towards your welfare."

The social justice and equality in Pakistani society

The prevalence of Islamic social justice ideas in Pakistani society is attributed to its primarily Muslim demographic. Islamic teachings inform the principles of social justice and equality. These principles exert a substantial influence on numerous facets of Pakistani culture¹⁴. Presented below are three comprehensive illustrations that demonstrate the manifestation of Islamic social justice within the context of Pakistani society:

The practice of zakat in Pakistan is a concrete manifestation of Islamic principles of social justice. Muslim individuals are religiously obligated to allocate a proportion of their financial resources towards assisting less fortunate individuals. These donated funds are utilised to provide support and aid to marginalised individuals who face disadvantages within society. The government plays a crucial role in facilitating the collection and distribution of zakat monies, specifically allocated towards poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, and other social welfare programmes. This practice has the dual purpose of mitigating economic inequities and upholding the Islamic tenet of wealth redistribution. This policy ensures that individuals with higher socioeconomic status actively support the well-being of less privileged individuals, fostering a society that is characterised by greater fairness and equality¹⁵.

Pakistan acknowledges and affirms the status of religious minority groups, including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and others, as individuals entitled to legal protection and societal inclusion by Islamic values of

¹⁴ Hussain, Mamnoon, and Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. "Paigham-e-Pakistan (The Message of Pakistan)[II] National Narrative Counter to Violence, Extremism, and Terrorism in an Islamic Perspective." (2019): 127-148.

¹⁵ Kamla, Rania, and Hussain G. Rammal. "Social reporting by Islamic banks: does social justice matter?." *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 26, no. 6 (2013): 911-945.

social justice. Consistent with these guiding principles, the government has enacted affirmative action policies to advance the rights and welfare of marginalised communities. An illustration of this can be observed in reserving reserved seats for religious minorities within the national and provincial parliament, guaranteeing their inclusion and participation in the legislative proceedings. Furthermore, there exists a range of legal provisions aimed at safeguarding the rights of minority groups, including the Prevention of Forced Conversions Act. This legislation specifically addresses instances of coerced conversions and serves to defend the rights of religious minorities. These policies indicate the Islamic principles of justice, equity, and safeguarding the rights of all individuals, irrespective of their religious affiliations ¹⁶.

Women's rights and empowerment are of significant importance in contemporary society. Pakistani society has encountered various obstacles to gender inequality. However, women's rights and empowerment proponents draw upon Islamic social justice values to support their cause. Islamic teachings emphasise women's dignity and equitable status, as seen by the Prophet Muhammad's profound respect for his wives and women within the broader societal context. Pakistan has undertaken legal reforms to safeguard the rights of women, which encompass the enactment of legislation addressing issues such as domestic abuse and workplace harassment. In addition, programmes like the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) aim to offer monetary aid to socioeconomically disadvantaged women. The endeavours above are by the ideals of justice and equality within the Islamic framework,

¹⁶ Hassan, Riffat. "Islam and human rights in Pakistan: A critical analysis of the positions of three contemporary women." *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 10, no. 1 (2002): 131-155.

showcasing a dedication to mitigating gender imbalances and fostering the active involvement of women in societal affairs¹⁷.

Incorporating Islamic social justice concepts is a fundamental aspect of Pakistani society, significantly impacting several domains such as policies, practices, and legislation. Illustrative instances such as zakat, affirmative action for minorities, and women's empowerment projects exemplify the active implementation of these principles to foster fairness, equity, and the overall welfare of all individuals in alignment with Islamic teachings. The legal framework plays a crucial role in promoting social justice. It provides the necessary structure and guidelines to ensure fairness, equality, and the protection of individuals' rights. Pakistan has implemented legislative measures and policy initiatives to tackle these difficulties, aiming to foster social justice and equality. The measures include¹⁸:

The Zakat and Ushr Ordinance: In Pakistan, the imposition of zakat on qualified individuals is implemented to address poverty and promote social welfare through the utilisation of the collected monies.

Affirmative Action: Quotas have been implemented to guarantee adequate representation and equal access to educational and job prospects for marginalised communities.

Legislation on Women's Rights: Pakistan has implemented legislative measures to safeguard women's rights, such as the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act and the Acid Control and Crime Prevention Act.

The Legal Safeguarding of Religious Freedom: The legal framework in Pakistan protects the rights of religious minority groups but with ongoing issues in effectively enforcing these safeguards.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Murad, Muhammad, and Shazma Razzaq. "The Responsible Role of Banking Services in Social Equity: A Thematic Analysis in Pakistani Perspective." *Journal of Banking and Social Equity (JBSE)* 1, no. 1 (2022): 61-68.

Findings

The ideals of social justice and equality hold significant importance in the Islamic faith, providing a comprehensive framework for resolving the socio-economic imbalances and issues prevalent in Pakistani society. Through a comprehensive analysis of these principles from an Islamic standpoint, Pakistan has the potential to navigate a trajectory towards a society characterised by fairness and equality, all the while upholding its Islamic beliefs. To advance towards this objective, it is imperative to undertake measures aimed at mitigating economic inequities, fostering gender equality, safeguarding minority rights, and fortifying the legal framework. Pakistan has the potential to foster a society characterised by fairness and compassion for all persons, irrespective of their backgrounds or circumstances, by leveraging its abundant Islamic tradition in the pursuit of social justice and equality.