

REVISITING SOCIAL JUSTICE: EXPLORING THE QUR'ANIC PARADIGM IN ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Freedom, equality, and fraternity serve as fundamental pillars within discussions on social justice, yet in the contemporary era, these principles have been greatly undermined, leading to increased social injustice within the realms of social, politics and economics. One contributing factor to this phenomenon is the predominant reliance on secular approaches to address social justice issues, neglecting the potential role of divine guidance found in the Qur'an. Despite being a comprehensive reference encompassing principle of social justice, the Qur'an has been largely overlooked as a source for solutions in the modern era. Therefore, this article aims to examine the Qur'anic paradigm of social justice that hold the potential to address the social justice challenges prevalent in the modern generation. This qualitative study employs content analysis as a primary methodology, supplemented by descriptive and thematic analysis to present the gathered data. Initially, social justice issues are identified, followed by an analysis of relevant Qur'anic verses using Qur'anic commentary books and related sources. The findings highlight fifteen Qur'anic verses that are intricately linked to the principles of social justice within the Qur'an, including the dignified ranking of humanity, freedom

of humanity, equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, and the respect for human rights.

Keywords: Social justice; human rights; al-Qur'an; socio-politics; Islam.

Khulasah

Kebebasan, kesaksamaan, dan persaudaraan berperan sebagai tonggak dalam perbincangan keadilan sosial, namun pada era kontemporari, prinsip-prinsip ini kerap kali diremehkan sehingga membawa kepada peningkatan ketidakadilan sosial dalam bidang sosial, politik dan ekonomi. Salah satu faktor penyumbang kepada fenomena ini ialah kebergantungan utama kepada pendekatan sekular sebagai alat menangani isu keadilan sosial dan pengabaian potensi peranan wahyu yang terdapat dalam al-Quran. Walaupun al-Quran merupakan rujukan komprehensif yang merangkumi prinsip keadilan sosial, ia kerap kali diabaikan sebagai sumber penyelesaian dalam era moden. Oleh itu, artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji paradigma keadilan sosial dalam al-Quran yang berpotensi untuk menawarkan solusi bagi menangani cabaran keadilan sosial yang berlaku dalam generasi moden. Kajian kualitatif ini menggunakan analisis kandungan sebagai metodologi utama, disokong oleh analisis deskriptif dan tematik untuk mempersembahkan data yang diperolehi. Ia bermula dengan pengenalan isu-isu keadilan sosial zaman kontemporari, diikuti oleh analisis ayat-ayat al-Quran yang relevan menggunakan kitab-kitab tafsir al-Quran dan sumber yang berkaitan. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa terdapat lima belas ayat-ayat al-Quran yang berkait rapat dengan prinsip-prinsip keadilan sosial dalam al-Quran, termasuklah kehormatan martabat manusia, kebebasan, pembahagian pemilikan dan peluang secara adil, dan pengiktirafan hak asasi manusia.

Kata kunci: Keadilan sosial; hak kemanusiaan; al-Quran; sosio-politik; Islam.

Introduction

Social justice revolves primarily around the equitable distribution of wealth, rights, and opportunities among members of society, as well as the fair and impartial treatment of all individuals within the community. The pervasive global increase in social injustice has sparked extensive societal debates¹. Throughout the centuries, the discourse on social justice has predominantly focused on its material dimensions, while neglecting the significance of the relationship between humanity and its Creator, Allah SWT. Despite the myriad discussions and deliberations on this subject, social justice issues persist without satisfactory resolutions, ultimately leading to the decline of human civilization. Osman Bakar asserts that the root cause of the crisis facing human civilization can be traced back to a crucial juncture in Western history, marked by the rejection of a God-centric worldview in favour of a human-centric perspective.² Despite the remarkable progress achieved in science and technology, modern civilization, shaped by Western ideals, is undergoing internal deterioration. The unfathomable persistence of oppression against marginalized groups in the contemporary era further aggravates this decline.

The Qur'an, being the divine revelation of Allah, contains numerous principles pertaining to social justice. Hence, it is the responsibility of humanity to delve into the depths of this divine revelation to navigate the prevailing social justice challenges of the modern era. The Qur'an should serve as a guiding compass, directing individuals towards appropriate behaviours and actions when addressing social justice problems. Although the literature

¹ Lena Dominelli & Vasilios Ioakimidis, "The Challenges of Realising Social Justice in 21st Century Social Work," *International Social Work* 59(6) (2016), 693-696.

² Osman Bakar, *Islamic Civilisation and the Modern World: Thematic Essays* (Brunei: UBD Press, 2014), 305-330.

extensively deliberates on social justice, the focal point primarily revolves around concepts such as the dignified status of mankind, liberty, fairness, and mutual responsibilities among society members. However, scant attention has been paid to examining the roles of Qur'anic paradigm in addressing the social justice issues existing in the contemporary era, despite its critical importance as the nucleus of the discourse.³

Therefore, the primary objective of this article is to investigate the Qur'anic perspective of social justice and its relevance in tackling the challenges of social justice issues faced by the modern generation. Employing a qualitative approach, this study utilised content analysis as a robust research tool, with data subsequently subjected to both descriptive and analytical methodologies. The findings of this inquiry reveal that from the Qur'anic perspective, social justice encompasses crucial aspects such as the preservation of human dignity, the promotion of human equality and freedom, the equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, and the unwavering commitment to upholding human rights.

Justice in Islamic Perspective

In order to comprehend the Islamic perspective on the definition of justice, it is imperative for an individual to consult the Qur'an, which is considered the most authoritative source in Islam. The Qur'an extensively encompasses various manifestations of the concept of justice. According to Fuad al-Baqi, the term 'justice' is reiterated seventy-eight times in the Qur'an, signifying the emphasis placed on its implementation⁴. Quraisy Shihab mentioned that the word justice in Qur'an comes from

³ Asyraf, H. A. R., WA Wan Ibrahim, & A. Nooraihan, "Islamic Concept of Social Justice in the Twentieth Century," *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 6(8) (2012), 1423-1428.

⁴ Fu'ad al-Baqi, *Mu'jam Mufahras li al-Alfaz al-Qur'an (Indexed Dictionary of Qur'anic Terms)* (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1945), 448-449.

words such as *'adala*, *qasata*, and *wazana* whereby the central root word *'adala* is reiterated twenty-eight times in the Qur'an in the forms of *'adala* and *'adl*⁵. Overall, *'adala* and its derivatives appear in the Qur'an in the form of intransitive verb, transitive verb, and also nouns.

As intransitive verbs, the term *'adala* is used in the Qur'an to indicate actions such as acting fairly, making just judgments, providing something as an equivalent, compensating, deviating, and turning away⁶. For instance, the Qur'anic verse in al-Shura verse 15 mentioned, "وَأْمُرْتُ بِالْعَدْلِ" that translates to "I have been commanded to do justice among you". On another hand, when used as a transitive verb, *'adala* in the Qur'an signifies actions such as straightening, erecting, ensuring proper proportion, and regarding or establishing something as equal⁷. In al-Infīṭār verse 7, Allah mentioned الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ that defines "who created you, proportioned you, and balanced you". In addition to its occurrence as a verb, the term *'adala* in the Qur'an also appears as a noun form, *'adl*, which encompasses meanings such as justice, fairness, equity, uprightness, impeccable character, equivalence, recompense, and the concept of justice itself⁸. For example, al-Nisa' verse 58 recorded "وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ" that translates to "and when you judge between people to judge with justice".

Therefore, the word *'adala* that is used as a verb in the Qur'an, be it transitive or intransitive, conveys the same meaning of justice to be practised towards the society members and being just as the immaculate character one should exemplify, which is aligned with the noun *'adl* that

⁵ Quraisy Syihab, *Wawasan Al-Quran: Tafsir Tematik atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Mizan: Bandung, 2007), 148-166.

⁶ Elsaid M. Badawi & Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage* (London: Brill, 2008).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 605.

⁸ *Ibid.*

is used to bring forth the concept of justice itself in the Qur'an.

Apart from that, *qist* is synonymous of 'adl and there are around twenty-five words in five different forms appears in the Qur'an. The Qur'an includes the term *qasata* and its related forms to demonstrate various meanings, such as acting justly, referring to those who act unjustly or unrighteously, the concept of being more or most just, individuals who act with justice or fairness, and the idea of justice itself⁹. Surah al-A'raf verse 29 mentions "قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِالْقِسْطِ" which translates to "My Lord has ordered justice". *Qasata* has similar connotations to the word 'adala in the Qur'an which brings morality and religious meanings.

Furthermore, the word *zulm*, which linguistically stands in opposition to 'adl, can be understood in two distinct ways: as either going too far or exceeding limits or as withholding too much or lacking sufficiency. Additionally, justice in the Qur'an also encompasses a sense of balance, exemplified through the root word *wazana*, which appears twenty-three times. The word *wazana* and its derivatives revolve around notions of weight, measure, scales, weighing, estimating, comparing, justice, wisdom, parallelism, and equality¹⁰. Surah al-Anbiya' verse 47 recorded "وَنَضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ فَلَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَإِنْ كَانَ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا بِهَا وَكَفَىٰ بِنَا حَاسِبِينَ" that translates to "and we place the scales of justice for the day of resurrection, so no soul will be treated unjustly at all". This highlights the multifaceted nature of justice, emphasizing the importance of equilibrium and fairness. The Qur'an has different dimensions of justice embedded in various words like 'adl, *qist*, and *wazn* and it is crucial for the people to explore and unveil these Qur'anic to understand the reality behind the concept of justice from Qur'anic perspective.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 756.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1024.

From the philosophical perspective, among the important Muslim scholars who successfully derived the notion of justice are al-Kindi, al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina. Al-Kindi views justice as a rational concept that could be harmonised with divine justice. His primary concern about justice is to seek the truth in its theoretical and practical settings. Al-Kindi categorised justice into two components namely; divine revelation with the harmonisation of reason faculty, and natural or rational. He defines a 'Just Man' as an individual who always stays true to the truth, does not compromise from it and never fails to fulfill his obligations. Justice serves as a moral compass guiding individuals to do 'what's right' based on reasons, while injustice arises when one loses control of their impulses and allows anger to overpower their reasoning, leading to wrongdoing¹¹. Justice, according to al-Kindi is not merely a noble virtue but also serves as a nucleus that harmonizes and coordinates the other virtues. He added that while justice is commonly perceived as a result of human reasoning, its ultimate inspiration comes from God, who gifted humans with the faculty of reason.

Besides al-Kindi, al-Farabi also made significant contributions to the understanding of justice by connecting it to the realm of politics. In his theory of political order, known as *al-siyasah al-madaniyyah*, he emphasized the need for virtues such as excellence, perfection, and justice to accompany political systems. According to al-Farabi, human beings can strive for perfection within three different types of political communities: the global or world state, the national or nation-state, and the local or city-state. One of al-Farabi's key concepts was The Virtuous City, where he envisioned a ruler with exceptional qualities, particularly reason, holding all powers of the executive,

¹¹ Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 79-83.

legislative, and judicial branches. This ruler, possessing a strong sense of justice, would establish a public order¹².

In this order, justice would prevail when all members of society are entitled to the pursuit of goodness, encompassing security, wealth, honour, dignity, and other vital aspects. Additionally, al-Farabi associated justice with an individual's destiny, acknowledging the concept of divine justice in the afterlife. According to his view, every person will be held accountable for their actions in the world, recognizing the ultimate justice that awaits them. Through his work, al-Farabi contributed to a comprehensive understanding of justice, exploring its connection to politics, societal well-being, and the spiritual realm of human existence.

Similar to al-Kindi and al-Farabi, al-Ghazali also opined that justice is of two levels namely divine and human where divine justice serves as a guidance to man's action and rational justice of mankind is a manifestation of human's free will endowed by God to them¹³. Both divine revelations and reasons provide guidance to pursue justice and goodness. The revealed law, encompassing commandments and prohibitions, elucidates principles of goodness and justice for humanity. Meanwhile, reason serves to uncover the underlying justifications that support these commandments and prohibitions. Al-Ghazali also elucidates further on the importance of justice to be established by a ruler through his book of *Counsel for King (Nasihah al-Muluk)*. He warned the rulers that their status was a blessing from Allah that would be accountable during the Day of Judgement. He further listed ten important reminders to the state leader in emphasizing the importance of the principle of justice to be implemented to the citizens.

¹² Al-Farabi, *al-Siyasah al-Madaniyyah* (Beirut: al-Matba'ah al-Kathulakiyah, 1998), 69-70.

¹³ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad* (Jeddah: Dar al-Minhaj, n.d), 43-44.

These reminders revolve around the rulers' responsibilities towards their subjects, including prioritizing the welfare of the Muslim community, demonstrating kindness and compassion in their interactions with citizens, ensuring government servants are trained to administer justice in all matters, refraining from excessive accumulation of wealth, avoiding association with corrupt scholars, and, most importantly, giving precedence to Allah's perspective over any other interests¹⁴.

When most Muslim scholars associate justice with other parties, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas proposed the concept of justice being both a quality of the act and a state of being. He recognised that the nature of justice derived from the name of Allah, *al-'Adl* (the Most Just) which apportion proper measure to each of His creations. In addition, he emphasized that justice originates from within oneself, where an individual has the capacity to manifest justice or, conversely, commit acts of oppression against oneself. By first directing justice inwardly, and subsequently extending justice to society and the state, the people pledge allegiance to the primary covenant that binds them with the divine, before engaging in agreements with society and the state. This elucidates that the source of loyalty, obedience, and willingness comes from God, rather than any particular nation, community, or state¹⁵.

He further added that justice is of two aspects namely, a) justice viewed as partial that constitutes four principles of virtues namely wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice, where it concerns the attainment of fairness and equitable wealth distribution, and b) justice viewed as a complete virtue and sets as the ultimate criterion of justice.

¹⁴ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Counsel for Kings (Nasihah al-Muluk)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 14-30.

¹⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Ta'dib International: Kuala Lumpur, 2020), 39-40.

It assumes the nature of an individual and can be universally applied across all human institutions.¹⁶

In conclusion, the Islamic perspective on justice, derived from the Qur'an's notions and the interpretations of Muslim philosophers, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and applying justice. The Qur'an emphasizes the multifaceted nature of justice, encompassing principles such as fairness, equitable measures, balanced judgment, and the establishment of proper proportion. Through the lexical analysis of terms such as *'adala*, *qasata*, and *wazana*, the Qur'an presents a nuanced understanding of justice, emphasizing the importance of wisdom and balance in all spheres of life. Furthermore, Muslim philosophers, including al-Kindi, al-Farabi, al-Ghazali, and al-Attas, have contributed to the discourse on justice, linking it to divine guidance, reason, politics, societal well-being, and personal virtue. This holistic perspective offers valuable insights into addressing social justice issues within today's contemporary society.

Comparison Between Social Justice from Islamic Tradition and Western Perspective

In Islamic point of view, social justice encompasses a comprehensive range of facets in human existence, including principles of equality and the denouncement of any form of discrimination based on physical attributes or individual capabilities. In contrast, John Rawls in his theory of social justice, places greater emphasis on the aspect of distribution where he employs the concept of the 'Veil of Ignorance' to guide individuals to the hypothetical 'original position', wherein individuals are compelled to select principles in a rational manner¹⁷. Rawls asserts the imperative of granting equal rights to all individuals, and

¹⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice and the Nature of Man* (Ta'dib International: Kuala Lumpur, 2020), 13-15.

¹⁷ Hazman Baharom, *Perihal Keadilan: Tinjauan Wacana Keadilan Moden* (Petaling Jaya: Gerakbudaya, 2020,) 123-152.

reducing social and economic disparities, with a focus on serving the interests of the least advantaged members of society¹⁸. While both Islam and Rawls' theory seek to promote justice and fairness, they differ in their approaches. Islam's concept of social justice is rooted in religious principles and encompasses a broader understanding of justice that includes not only distribution but also equality and non-discrimination. On the other hand, Rawls' theory of social justice primarily focuses on distributive justice and aims to create a fair and just society through equal distribution of resources and opportunities within the framework of a hypothetical original position.

The Islamic perspective posits an intrinsic interdependence between harmony and equality, emphasizing that justice plays a pivotal role in fostering societal harmony, even if absolute equality may be unattainable in practical terms. Contrasting with Western traditions, St. Augustine prioritized harmony over strict egalitarianism, discouraging animosity among individuals over trivial matters.¹⁹ In terms of wealth distribution, Islam acknowledges the rightful claim of the indigent to sustenance from the affluent, while emphasizing the necessity of legitimate means and condemning actions such as theft. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas argues that wealth distribution stems from human agreement rather than being solely governed by natural law, without considering it sinful for the impoverished to seek sustenance from the affluent.²⁰ Addressing inequality in both perspectives involves acts of charity, but Islam further goes beyond charity with obligatory alms or zakat, serving as a

¹⁸ Emma Smith, *Key Issues in Education and Social Justice* (California: Sage Publication, 2018), 17.

¹⁹ Saint Augustine, *The City of God* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952).

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Contra Gentiles," in *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945).

fundamental pillar, demonstrating Islam's commitment to safeguarding the rights of the impoverished and destitute.

Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of exploring the perspectives of influential modern thinkers, including Karl Marx. Marx, an ardent critic of the capitalist system, deems it inherently unjust due to its individualistic nature, promotion of inequitable exchange, unjust distribution of resources, and exploitation of the working class. Diverse strands of Marxist thought converge in identifying class conflict as the fundamental source of social ills, although they may diverge in terms of proposed solutions aimed at fostering social harmony.²¹

Moreover, it is noteworthy to consider Karl Marx's dismissal of the role of religion in matters of justice, as he famously proclaimed that religion functions as the opiate of the masses. Within the Muslim community, there exists a range of responses to Marxist ideology. Certain individuals reject it outright due to its dissociation of religion from the realm of social justice whereas some Muslims exhibit a greater degree of receptiveness towards Marxist conceptions of social justice, albeit with the caveat of disavowing its materialistic and atheistic tenets.²² As a comprehensive religion (*shumul*), Islam diverges from Marxism in its emphasis on the inseparability of religion from the concept of social justice. Muslims are thus urged to exercise caution in fully aligning themselves with Marxist ideology, as doing so may potentially entail compromising their religious beliefs and principles.

²¹ Milad Milani & Drew Cottle, "Quest for Justice: Islamism, Social Justice, and Civility in Islamic History," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 4(3) (2018), 390-410.

²² Michaëlle Browers, *Political Ideology in the Arab World: Accommodation and Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 52.

Scope and Methodology

Given the nature of the data, which necessitates an in-depth examination of a specific document, namely the Qur'an, a qualitative approach employing document analysis was deemed most appropriate for this study. The data collection process entailed the identification of contemporary social justice issues, followed by the identification of relevant Qur'anic verses that hold potential for addressing these issues. Subsequently, the selected Qur'anic verses were scrutinized with the aid of authoritative books of Qur'anic commentary, allowing for the extraction of supporting contextual information, including insights into the reasons behind the revelation of the verses, the individuals or parties involved (if applicable), and the prevailing geographical and historical circumstances surrounding them.

Qur'anic Paradigm of Social Justice

Islam, as a religion rooted in principles of justice and peace, consistently advocates for a state of comprehensive societal well-being and cohesion, transcending boundaries of race, religion, and complexion. This commitment to universal harmony and prosperity is not solely theoretical but finds concrete manifestation in the lived experiences of individuals, notably exemplified by the establishment of the inaugural state in Madinah²³. The Qur'an is the most fundamental source in Islamic tradition which contains guidance in many aspects including the principles of social justice. It found that social justice principles in the Qur'an can be found in fifteen Qur'anic verses from different Surah which are al-Isra', al-Baqarah, al-Hujurat, al-An'am, al-Anfal, Al-'Alaq, al-Zumar, al-Nahl, al-Hashr, 'Abasa, Ali 'Imran and al-Nisa'. Furthermore, when examining social

²³ Mohd Muhiden Abd Rahman, Mohd Bakht Haji Ali & Mohd Sufillah Mohd Soyong, "Peranan Hubungan Muslim dan Non-Muslim Terhadap Kemakmuran dan Keharmonian Sejagat: Suatu Kajian Dari Perspektif al-Sunnah," *Al-Basirah* 2 (2017), 43–51.

justice from the perspectives offered by the Qur'an, it becomes evident that the concept encompasses various dimensions, including the preservation of human dignity and the upholding of fundamental human rights. Additionally, it encompasses equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, as well as the recognition and safeguarding of the freedom of humanity.

Dignity of the Mankind

Human dignity or *Karamah Insaniyyah* holds a significant position as a cardinal principle in the discourse surrounding social justice. However, within the contemporary context, the intrinsic worth and values of individuals are persistently subjected to violation and transgression by dominant authorities, particularly in instances where oppressive measures are directed toward marginalized communities. For instance, in the case of China, a report documented by the collaborative efforts between the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights highlights China's alleged contravention of the Genocide Convention of 1948 to the Uyghur communities through a series of repeated and wide-ranging offenses, including mass internment, government-imposed homestays, the forcible relocation of Uyghur children to state-controlled facilities, the systematic erasure of Uyghur cultural and communal identity, and the selective targeting of intellectuals and community leaders²⁴. These cumulative actions, as outlined in the report, raise serious concerns about the potential commission of genocide and reflect the grave implications for the Uyghur population's fundamental rights, social fabric, and collective well-being. These actions clearly indicate the violation of human

²⁴ "Policy Report: The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China's Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention", *Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy*, accessed 27th Nov 2021, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/uyghurs/the-uyghur-genocide-an-examination-of-chinas-breaches-of-the-1948-genocide-convention/>.

dignity and devalue human rights. Thus, the international committee must urgently address and safeguard human dignity, responding to the glaring social injustices that demand immediate attention.

According to the Qur'anic viewpoint, the resolution for the degradation of mankind's dignity lies in acknowledging that Allah has bestowed upon human beings a remarkable honour, surpassing that of all other creations, thereby elevating their status. Despite the existence of creatures endowed with physical strength and grandeur, Allah has explicitly chosen humans as the pinnacle of His creation.

"We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; Given them for sustenance things Good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, Above a great part of Our Creation."

Al-Isra' 17: 70

Apart from that, human beings are entrusted with the responsibility of stewardship over the earth, signifying their elevated position and role in the divine plan. This entails a moral obligation to act in accordance with the principles of justice, and righteousness, while also recognizing the inherent dignity and rights of all individuals.

"And (mention, O Muhammad), when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" He (Allah) said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know.""

Al-Baqarah 2:30

This verse elucidates the dialogue between Allah and the angels regarding the designation of humanity as the successors on earth, known as the *khalifah*. Syed Qutb

expounds that this conversation implies a contrast between the angels' unwavering worship of Allah and the inherent human traits that may lead to moral corruption and the taking of lives.²⁵ Allah's declaration that the angels are not endowed with superior wisdom emphasizes their limited knowledge compared to the omniscience of Allah SWT. Therefore, mankind is burdened with the profound responsibility of serving as the custodians of the earth, and it is incumbent upon them to bear the weight of this immense obligation.

In addition to the elevated status of mankind and the appointment as the vicegerent of the world, the Qur'an also describes that humanity was diversified into various tribes, complexions, and genders, aiming to foster mutual understanding and recognition (*lita'ārafu*). According to Syed Qutb, Allah's diverse creations possess distinctive qualities encompassing abilities, strengths, emotions, and intellects, all intended to complement one another and appreciate each other's strengths, thereby cultivating the finest *ummah* (community).²⁶ Although Allah has kept the exact hierarchy of His servants undisclosed, He has emphasized that piety is the virtue that holds the utmost importance in His eyes.

“O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may (get to) know one another. Surely the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

Al-Hujurat 49:13

The Prophet PBUH has reflected these Qur'anic commandments through various means including the final

²⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shades of the Quran* (Seri Kembangan: Pustaka Darul Iman, 2015), 1:51.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17:97.

sermon that stands as a testament to preserving human dignity. In this sermon, he emphasized the equality of all mankind by declaring that an Arab holds no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab hold superiority over an Arab. Similarly, he stated that a white person is no better than a black person, except in terms of piety and good deeds.²⁷ This pivotal sermon highlights the importance of upholding mankind's dignity by acknowledging that the only criterion for superiority among the people is piety and good action, rather than physical appearance, economic or social status within the community.

Therefore, it is concluded that the Qur'anic views of human dignity recognise the immense privilege conferred upon mankind where individuals are entrusted with the role of *khalifah*, faithfully upholding principles of equity and safeguarding the inherent dignity of every human being. Besides, the diversity of Allah's creations aims to inculcate mutual understanding rather than enabling any particular group to assert dominance and oppress communities that possess distinct skin colours or cultures. Hence, it becomes incumbent upon humanity to embrace this weighty responsibility entrusted by Allah, steadfastly rejecting any inclination to exploit others for personal gain. These Qur'anic paradigms on human dignity render solutions to solve social injustice in the contemporary era. Such a conscientious commitment to upholding justice ensures that no individual should endure the harrowing experience of living in a state of constant fear due to the maltreatment inflicted upon them.

²⁷ "Prophet Muhammad's Last Sermon", Islamhouse.com, accessed June 30, 2023, https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_articles/single2/en_Prophet_Muhammad_Last_Sermon.pdf

Human Rights

The conceptualization of social justice would remain incomplete if it were to neglect the indispensable incorporation of human rights, which is a pivotal role in the attainment of justice within societies. Western thought has propounded a conception of human rights as universally applicable; however, it is imperative to acknowledge the understanding and interpretation of this phrase evolved over time. The historical trajectory of the West manifests an intricate tapestry of both transgressions against human rights and endeavours toward emancipation, thereby underscoring the evolving nature of their comprehension and realization.

The Arabic term for 'right' in the Arabic language is *haqq*, which is one of Allah's names *al-Haqq* which refers to 'Truth and Reality'. In the Qur'an, the word *haqq* encompasses various meanings such as 'recognised share', 'claim', 'right', 'privilege', 'justification', 'duty', 'dues', 'correct argument', 'just claim', 'truth', 'liability', and 'an attribute of God'²⁸. This understanding elucidates Islam's emphasis on human rights. Mankind's first right is related to the responsibilities as vicegerent to bring prosperity on earth in diverse ranges such as personal, legal, social, and political. Men have been honoured by Allah out of all of His creations to conduct justice in the world. As the Qur'an elucidates diverse dimensions of human rights, the Prophet as a messenger translates the Qur'anic principles in the inaugural constitution of Madinah which bore testament to the protection of human rights and espoused their meticulous preservation under the Prophet's stewardship. This was achieved despite the dissimilar backgrounds and circumstances of the community.

Despite the prioritization of Allah's rights over those of human beings in Islam, it would be fallacious to deduce

²⁸ Elsaid M. Badawi & Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Quranic Usage* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 224.

the neglect of human rights. Even though Islam has often been subject to accusations of incongruity with human rights, stemming from incomplete information and selective observation of the implementation of criminal laws in specific nations, a thorough examination of the Qur'anic perspective reveals a contrasting reality, challenging such assertions.

The Qur'an initially listed various human rights to be safeguarded long before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Al-An'am verse 151 significantly mentions the right to live where Allah forbids murdering children for the sake of poverty, as well as murdering any individual whom Allah has forbidden unless by legal authority. Individuals must cultivate unwavering certainty in Allah as the provider (*al-Razzaq*) and persistently seek sustenance, relying on Allah instead of succumbing to the fear of poverty.

“Say, (O Prophet), “Come! Let me recite to you what your Lord has forbidden to you: do not associate others with Him (in worship). (Do not fail to) honour your parents. Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for you and for them. Do not come near indecencies, openly or secretly. Do not take a (human) life made sacred by Allah except with (legal) right. This is what He has commanded you, so perhaps you will understand.”

Al-An'am 6:151

In this verse, Allah explicitly prohibits the act of associating partners with Him (*shirk*) and imparts guidance to humanity, cautioning against succumbing to fear-induced desperation leading to the atrocious act of infanticide. The divine assurance of sustenance from Allah Himself serves as an antidote to such extreme measures. Moreover, Allah forbids the taking of innocent life, which He has sanctified, unless it complies with due legal process,

as elucidated by al-Suyuti and al-Mahalli²⁹, and solely in instances of prescribed punishment for apostasy or stoning as retribution for the grave transgression of fornication. The mentioned verse encapsulates a profound manifestation of the Qur'anic perspective pertaining to the intricate layers of social justice, with a specific emphasis on the sacrosanctity of the right to life.

Humanity possesses an inherent entitlement to a life characterized by freedom from exploitation and degradation, as explicitly delineated by Allah's affirmation of mankind's right to live and their dignified status. Allah, being the sole bestower of life and death upon His servants, bears ultimate authority over existence. It is crucial to underscore the gravity of the sin of murder, which can potentially consign an individual to the depths of hellfire as their ultimate abode. Consequently, the right to live is an intrinsic prerogative of humanity, and it is the collective responsibility of mankind as stewards of the earth to protect this foundational human right, as elucidated within the Qur'an.

Apart from the right to live, the right to shelter is also perceived as one of the crucial aspects of human rights. Every individual is entitled to adequate shelter, affording them comfort and protection from harm. The provision of housing is integral to upholding the sanctity of the family unit, as it serves as a protection for human beings. Moreover, shelter fulfills our essential needs, including access to nourishment, hydration, and clothing, as it shields us from adverse weather conditions that may contribute to illness and detriment to our well-being. If a family does not have shelter, the sustenance of society might be corroded due to the fragility of the family institution.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in homelessness, which poses various challenges and has far-

²⁹ Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti & Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1999), 827.

reaching implications for social exclusion and social justice³⁰. Malaysia, particularly Kuala Lumpur, has faced exacerbated issues of homelessness due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) resulted in widespread unemployment and business closures, pushing some Malaysians into homelessness as they could no longer afford housing and basic expenses³¹. A shelter is a comfortable place to be, and everyone should have access to one since it is seen as a fundamental human right. The Qur'an approves this idea through the following verse.

“Those who believed, emigrated, and strived with their wealth and lives in the cause of Allah, as well as those who gave them shelter and help; they are truly guardians of one another. As for those who believed but did not emigrate, you have no obligations to them until they emigrate. But if they seek your help (against persecution) in faith, it is your obligation to help them, except against people bound with you in a treaty. Allah is All-Seeing of what you do.”

Al-Anfal 8:72

Based on the Qur'anic verses, Islam encouraged the believers to assist each other by providing shelter and help through the example of *Muhajirin* (those who migrate to Makkah) and *Ansar* (those who reside in Madinah) who willingly open their arms and do not hesitate to offer help in many forms. Despite neither having a family nor a

³⁰ Muhammad Wafi Ramli & Sharifah Rohayah Sheikh Dawood, “Revealing Homelessness Phenomenon in Malaysia: A Case Study in Georgetown, Penang” *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, Future Academy, 2017, 791-799.

³¹ Noralina Omar & Mohd Alif Jasni, “Challenges of the Homeless People During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Situation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia,” in *Handbook of Research on the Impact of COVID-19 on Marginalized Populations and Support for the Future* (United States: IGI Global, 2021), 153-167.

spouse, they were linked on the axis of *tawhid* and the *Ansar* were prepared to aid the *Muhajirin*. The *Muhajirin* moved purely for Allah's sake unruffled by any economic, blood-ties and other worldly temptations. The same goes for the *Ansar* who gave the *Muhajirin* sanctuary and unwavering assistance as their only objective was to receive Allah's blessings³².

Even though this verse was written in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, it is not uncommon to think of it in the context of today where the homelessness issues and refugees are prevalent due to the continuous injustice that is happening worldwide. By incorporating the Qur'anic perspective on the right to live alongside an example of its application in the prophetic tradition, a potential solution to contemporary issues, such as homelessness, could be found. An illustrative instance can be observed in the establishment of the Homeless Transit Centre by the Malaysian government, with the objective of providing shelter and support for vulnerable members of the community who lack the means to secure adequate housing³³. Ensuring citizens' right to shelter, which offers protection and promotes comfortable living, necessitates continuing government and non-governmental organisation support. This assistance is critical in averting damage and fostering an atmosphere in which people can thrive.

Furthermore, the right to education is also a fundamental branch of human rights whereby children are entitled to receive education regardless of the community, religious affiliation, racial background, or socioeconomic position. Access to education and children's empowerment are two important elements for the development of any

³² Qutb, *In the Shades of the Quran*, 10:390.

³³ Opalyn Mok, "Penang's RM4.4m Transit Centre a Beacon of Hope for the Homeless," *Malaymail.com*, June 16, 2023, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/06/16/penangs-rm44m-transit-centre-a-beacon-of-hope-for-the-homeless/74644>

child. Malaysia takes full responsibility for implementing the right to education among Malaysian citizens through legal codes in the Federal Constitution, Education Act and National Education Policy. However, it does not extend to stateless children.

The stateless children residing within Malaysia can be classified into distinct subcategories, including unregistered offspring of Malaysian citizens, forsaken children, stateless minors born to irregular and unauthorized migrants, and progeny originating from stateless refugee populations³⁴. Among the reasons for statelessness in Malaysia include the failure of parents' registration of marriage, failure of birth registration, children of irregular migrants and children of stateless refugees³⁵. Even though the constitution clearly mentions no discrimination towards Malaysian citizens, it is suggested that the government takes a gentle approach and practise on human rights basis by facilitating public school registration requirements for stateless children. This approach aligns with the Qur'anic perspective in preserving the right to education for everyone. Islam places utmost importance on the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, thereby elevating the social standing of individuals possessing scholarly wisdom.

"Read, (O Prophet) in the Name of your Lord
Who created."

Al-'Alaq 96:1

The inaugural revelation bestowed upon Prophet Muhammad in the Cave of Hira' imparts profound insight into the pivotal role accorded to knowledge within the Islamic framework, thereby reinforcing the Qur'anic

³⁴ Mazura Md Saman & Nor Hafizah Mohd Badrol Affandi, "Honouring Primary Education for Stateless Children: Analysis of Malaysian Legal Perspective and Current Practice," *International Journal for Studies on Children, Women, Elderly and Disabled* 3 (2018), 33-38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

affirmation of the fundamental right to education. Within this pivotal verse, Allah, in His divine wisdom, prioritizes the cultivation of literacy and commands the revered angel, Jibril, to instruct the Prophet in the sacred act of recitation, thereby highlighting the primacy of intellectual engagement. The need for education is further emphasised in the next verse by highlighting the worth of knowledgeable individuals relative to ignorant ones.

“Say, (O Prophet), “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” None will be mindful (of this) except people of reason.”

Al-Zumar 39:9

Al-Mahalli and al-Suyuti explain that the scholars and the ignorant person are not equal as they possess different qualities and levels of knowledge. It is abundantly evident from the verses presented that Islam regards the right to education very highly. People who are educated are less likely to experience oppression and are more aware of their rights. It improves one’s position and helps others find solutions to their current problems. Besides, drawing upon the historical account of the Prophet’s *sirah*, a notable instance highlighting the significance of education is when the Prophet instructed the prisoners of war from the Battle of Badr to impart literacy skills to the Muslim community³⁶. Thus, the Qur’anic paradigm of the right to education should serve as a fundamental principle upon which the right of education is based, extending its reach to include stateless children. These children, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, deserve the opportunity to shape their future trajectories through education. Education can serve as a guiding light, enabling them to break the cycle of ignorance and empowering them to advocate for their rights.

³⁶ Al-Mubarakfuri, *The Sealed Nectar* (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 2002), 276.

Therefore, the Qur'anic perspective on human rights serves as a foundational principle for promoting social justice, encompassing various aspects of human life. It highlights the sanctity of life by forbidding the killing of children due to fear of poverty, the arbitrary taking of human lives without legal authority, and the practice of murdering daughters based on tradition and shame. Moreover, the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of the right to shelter by showcasing the commitment of the *Ansar* in providing shelter and support to the *Muhajirin* who migrated to Madinah for the sake of Allah.

From the Islamic perspective, the right to shelter is the foundation for the successful establishment of a family unit where the basic necessities will be provided. The Qur'anic paradigm of the right to education also plays a significant role in the discourse of human rights. It underscores the importance of knowledge, as exemplified by the first Qur'anic verse revealed and a verse from surah al-Zumar which emphasizes the importance of knowledge and the elevated status of scholars compared to the ignorant. This understanding has the potential to liberate individuals from ignorance and serves as an empowering tool for those deprived of education to advocate for their rights.

Fair Distribution of Wealth and Opportunities

Another important issue to be discussed in social justice in the current century is the fair distribution of wealth and opportunity among the citizens. In Malaysia, the inclusive growth development approach aims to reduce poverty and economic disparities between ethnic groups and regions. Although poverty rates have drastically decreased from 49.3% in 1970 to 0.4% in 2014, considerable economic inequalities persist in the present times³⁷. Despite the efforts

³⁷ Nai Peng Tey et al., "Income Inequality Across State in Malaysia," *Planning Malaysia: Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planner* 17(2) (2019), 12-26.

to promote equitable regional progress, income inequality persists, with the minimum wage not keeping pace with the rising cost of living. These examples highlight the unfair distribution of wealth and opportunities, calling for a more just and structured system where wealth is based on skills and efforts, rather than political connections or inheritance.

In addressing the issue of unfair wealth distribution and opportunities, the Qur'an first reminds mankind that wealth is among the blessings bestowed by Allah upon humanity, requiring prudent and conscientious management. The Qur'an also acknowledges that wealth can be a test for individuals, and everyone will be held accountable on the Day of Judgement for their handling of wealth and all associated matters.

“And Allah has favoured some of you over others in provision. But those who have been much favoured would not share their wealth with those (bonded people) in their possession, making them their equals. Do they then deny Allah’s favours?”

Al-Nahl 16:71

Allah acknowledges in this verse that the provisions He has given to humanity may vary from one another. Al-Suyuti and al-Mahali then expounded that it signifies those certain individuals are substantially richer and poorer than others³⁸. Mankind must thus organise for a just distribution of wealth among themselves in their capacity as vicegerents. The presence of an equitable leader assumes a pivotal role within the ongoing discourse surrounding the equitable distribution paradigm, as leaders bear the inherent responsibility of managing and allocating a nation's resources. The fair distribution of wealth is further detailed in the following Qur'anic verse of al-Hashr which explains

³⁸ Al-Suyuti & al-Mahalli, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, 827.

the objective of wealth to be distributed to prevent the wealth to be dominated only by the rich.

“And what Allah restored to His Messenger from the people of the towns - it is for Allah and for the Messenger and for (his) near relatives and orphans and the (stranded) traveller - so that it will not be a perpetual distribution among the rich from among you. And whatever the Messenger has given you - take; and what he has forbidden you - refrain from. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.”

Al-Hashr 59:7

Al-Baghawi expounds that ‘the rich from among you’ refers to the leaders and the powerful who dominate over the poor and the weak³⁹. This is due to the practise of the leaders who allocate majorly of the booty to themselves rather than distributing it to the people. In addition, ‘Ali Shariati mentioned that the underlying source of injustice can be attributed to a materialistic viewpoint coupled with the adoption of irreligious worldviews⁴⁰. One whose ultimate aim is to be extremely wealthy is prone to adopt this way of life and might even be willing to exploit and manipulate others through deceit, cheating, usury, corruption and others, as long as the objective of gaining wealth is achieved. Islam, a faith that respects the ideal of justice, thus detests the notion of materialism and an excessive love of riches. It establishes economic institutions such as *zakat*, Islamic banking, and *takāful* to ensure that wealth is not concentrated solely in the hands of the rich, thereby promoting a more equitable distribution. Islam is a religion that sets ‘balance’ as the objective when

³⁹ Al-Baghawi, *Ma‘alim al-Tanzil fi Tafsiir al-Qur‘an: Tafsiir al-Baghawi* (Riyadh: Dar al-Tayyibah, 1997), 5.

⁴⁰ ‘Ali Shariati, *Man and Islam* (Texas: Free Islamic Literature, 1981), 63.

it criticises the idea of 'love of wealth', but at the same time defends the society to achieve justice and fairness.

Besides that, the Qur'an also advocates equal opportunity for everyone despite differences and acknowledges that people have varied capabilities. Discrimination based on a person's ability should not take place; instead, it should inspire others to assist those with special needs. The Qur'an explains on this notion through the Qur'anic verses from Surah Abasa.

"But as for the one who came to you, eager (to learn). While he fears (Allah). You were inattentive to him. But no! This (revelation) is truly a reminder."

'Abasa 80: 8-11

During an occasion where the Prophet Muhammad was engaged in discussions with the leaders of the Quraysh tribe, endeavouring to extend an invitation to Islam, an encounter ensued wherein 'Abd Allah Ibn Umm Maktum, a visually impaired companion, approached the Prophet earnestly seeking knowledge about the Islam. In this instance, the Prophet did not divert his attention from the prominent leaders towards 'Abd Allah Ibn Umm Maktum. Hence, Allah admonished Prophet Muhammad for his conduct, underscoring the divine principle of equal regard and concern for all individuals, irrespective of their position of authority or influence. Consequently, the Prophet rectified his action, subsequently exhibiting attentiveness towards 'Abd Allah Ibn Umm Maktum and demonstrating kindness by inquiring about his needs. This scenario highlights the need for equal opportunities for individuals with special needs and varying abilities.

Therefore, it can be concluded that equitable allocation of wealth and opportunities among society members is one of the important elements of social justice as explicitly emphasized in the Qur'an. The Qur'an reminds people that Allah is the original owner of wealth, and He

has blessed different individuals with varying portions of wealth as a test for them to fulfil their role as *khalifah* in managing resources on earth. Besides, Islam advocates for equal wealth distribution, evident in the obligatory allocations of *zakat* and other measures aimed at reducing economic disparities between the rich and the poor. Furthermore, the Qur'an promotes equal opportunities for all individuals, including those with special needs and acknowledges their rights as active members of the community.

Freedom of Humanity

Social justice also centres on the notion of liberty, whereby a society is to be emancipated if its people are neither exploited nor under the power of any one group. However, the prevailing understanding of freedom is often misinterpreted, particularly in Western societies, placing undue emphasis on individual rights that prioritize personal desires without due consideration for the overall moral fabric that may deteriorate as a result. In accordance with Islamic teachings, our physical bodies and souls belong to our Creator, Allah, thereby instilling upon us the imperative duty to exercise due care and stewardship over them⁴¹.

Freedom of expression is an essential aspect of the discourse on freedom. Freedom of expression allows opinions and alternative perspectives to be elucidated and propagated to the relevant. This right is commonly practised in socio-political life where everyone has the right to express their opinions under the protection of the constitution of almost all of the countries in the world. However, it is regrettable that a significant portion of the world's population often misused this right to perpetrate offenses, ridicule, and spread hateful speech towards others. Examples of such events include religious

⁴¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (California: Harper One, 2002), 279.

defamation manifested through various offensive actions like burning the Qur'an or blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad. Disturbingly, certain elements within Western society have engaged in these offensive acts without due regard for the potential offense caused to the Muslim community, all while claiming to exercise freedom of expression⁴². The Western perspective advocates absolute freedom of expression where it relies predominantly on legal and reasoning and disregards moral guidelines based on religious teachings.

In engaging with the discourse of freedom of expression, the Qur'an first prioritise the principle of 'enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil' or '*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*'. This principle emphasizes the importance of having good intentions, and seeking improvement while considering different viewpoints. Freedom of expression should never be used to purposefully offend others and must not be conflated with hate speech. If the intention is to defame or belittle the concerned party, it will only foster a negative atmosphere and may even result in the character assassination of the individual facing criticism. Thus, the positive intentions in providing commentary and criticism are pivotal in ensuring that the essential points are taken into consideration by those receiving the criticism. This principle sets as the foundation of freedom of expression according to the Qur'anic paradigm.

"And let there be (arising) from you a nation inviting to (all that is) good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful."

Ali 'Imran 3:104

⁴² Riaz Ahmad Saeed, "Exploration of Freedom of Expression in Islam and West: Its Relation with Blasphemy and Religious Defamation," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 6 (Spring 2016), 17-36.

Furthermore, the Qur'an emphasises the need of basing criticism on facts rather than preconceptions intended to manipulate public perception. It emphasises the importance of performing extensive investigations to ensure the accuracy of information acquired. When it comes to news emanating from a corrupt individual, it is critical to verify the veracity of their claims and refrain from passing judgement simply on their comments, as they are prone to fabrication.

“O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.”

Al-Hujurat 49:6

Ibn Kathir mentioned that some scholars even refrain from accepting narrations from an individual whose status is unknown due to the possibility of erroneous accusations that might occur⁴³. This demonstrates Islam's commitment to upholding freedom of expression based on truth rather than mere assumptions.

At certain times, freedom of expression could also become a form of obligation especially if it is meant to prevent oppression. It is incumbent for the citizens to unite and express their dissatisfaction and disappointment through various means such as in physical or written form if they face oppression and assault from the authority. The Qur'an mentions that if any disagreement occurs over any affairs, the primary reference must be made to Allah and the Messenger.

“And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe

⁴³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Riyadh: Dar al-Tayyibah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1999), 370.

in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best (way and best in result."

Al-Nisa' 4: 59

Al-Shawkani mentioned that referring to Allah means referring it the book of Allah, al-Qur'an, and 'referring to the Messenger' means referring it to the prophetic sunnah⁴⁴. Kamali added that this verse acknowledges the potential conflicts between the ruler and the citizens thus the commandment of obedience does not supersede the citizen's rights to express their concerns and question the leaders⁴⁵. In fact, the Prophet even highlighted in the hadith from Ibn Majah that, "The best of jihad is a just word spoken to an unjust ruler"⁴⁶.

Therefore, freedom of expression as one of the pillars of social justice requires a profound understanding to ensure its accurate application within society. The Qur'an asserts that freedom of expression should be accompanied by moral consideration and does not endorse absolute freedom without accountability as observed in certain Western societies. It is rooted in the principle of enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*) which underscores the necessity of expressing oneself with the right intention. Besides, any criticism should be grounded in verifiable facts rather than unfounded assumptions about various matters. Freedom of expression in the Qur'anic paradigm could also appear to be a form of obligation wherein disputes are resolved by referring to the book of Allah and the sunnah of the Prophet. The integration of these Qur'anic perspectives on freedom of expression offers valuable insights and remedies for

⁴⁴ Al-Shawkani, *Fath al-Qadir* (Damascus: Dar Ibn Kathir, 1993), 556.

⁴⁵ Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997), 103.

⁴⁶ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, hadith 4011 (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'arif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1996), 662.

addressing the challenges associated with unrestricted freedom of expression in contemporary society.

Freedom of religion stands as a vital pillar of liberty, playing a crucial role in fostering a society where social justice thrives. Religion encompasses the belief system one embraces, revolving around the existence of a higher power commonly referred to as a divine being. It guides an individual's moral compass, shapes their worldview, and provides a profound sense of purpose and meaning in life. According to Article 3(1) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution, individuals have the freedom to openly practice their religion, with Islam being acknowledged as the official religion of Malaysia, while allowing for the peaceful practice of other religions. However, as Malaysia has long achieved its independence, there seems to be a deteriorating fighting spirit for racial unity, peace, mutual trust, and respect. As a result, the continuance of harmony and religious tolerance is slowly fading⁴⁷. Thus, one of the efforts to increase religious tolerance in Malaysia is solving the inter-ethnic conflicts that emerge from the deep prejudice, lack of understanding the values, attitudes, and traditions of other community members. This inter-ethnic friction can be reduced by creating a dialogue space that encourages open discussion to build trust, respect, and compassion between Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia⁴⁸.

In the Qur'anic paradigm, the notion of freedom of religion encompasses the unfettered realm of conscience in matters of faith, encompassing the liberty to pursue spiritual salvation. The Qur'an emphasizes that belief in Allah ought to be grounded in unwavering conviction and

⁴⁷ Nur Farhana Abdul Rahman & Khadijah Mohd Khambali, "Religious Tolerance in Malaysia: Problems and Challenges," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 3 (June 2013), 81-91.

⁴⁸ Chandra Muzaffar, *A Plea for Empathy: The Quest for Malaysian Unity* (Kuala Lumpur: Zubedy Ideahouse Sdn. Bhd. 2010), 229-250.

genuine faith, rather than being compelled by external forces or authoritarian imposition. Allah seeks that individuals internalize their beliefs based on their own volition and conscientious choice, ultimately sharing the truth through knowledge and virtuous instruction. This aligns with the Qur'anic injunction, as elucidated in al-Baqarah, verse 256, wherein Allah asserts the prohibition of compulsion in matters of faith. Furthermore, the Qur'an underscores the principle of justice in a universal context, wherein the imperative to uphold justice extends even to interactions with individuals adhering to different religious traditions⁴⁹.

“Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood.”

Al-Baqarah 2:256

Ibn Kathir expounds on the discouragement of compelling anyone to embrace Islam as guidance comes through clear signs and willing acceptance, while coercion brings no true benefit⁵⁰. The Qur'an unequivocally denounces the act of utilizing religion as a means of exploiting individuals, as forceful imposition stands inherently incongruent with the essence of religion, which is deeply intertwined with matters of faith and voluntary human agency. Promoting Islam or engaging in *da'wah* is permissible, but it should be approached with wisdom (*hikmah*) and gentle persuasion. The utilization of a tactful and nuanced methodology is imperative, as rigid, and uncompromising *da'wah* practices run the risk of repelling individuals, thereby obscuring their ability to discern its inherent beauty.

⁴⁹ Samiul Hasan, "Islamic Concept of Social Justice: Its Possible Contribution to Ensuring Harmony and Peaceful Coexistence in a Globalised World," *Macquarie Law Journal* 7 (2007), 167-183.

⁵⁰ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 682

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a way that is best.”

Al-Nahl 16:125

Ibn ‘Ashur explains that ‘wisdom’ in this verse refers to accurate understanding according to human capacity, avoiding confusion and errors, and encompassing knowledge that enhances people’s well-being and belief in constant improvement⁵¹. Facilitating dialogues that foster interfaith engagement, as opposed to erecting barriers, serves as a viable approach to internalizing the notion of religious freedom. Mutual agreement on universal principles is necessary for the country to be peaceful and harmonious, to embrace diversity, and to respect each other’s various belief systems.

Substantiating this perspective, Prophet Muhammad’s commitment to administering justice impartially, even to those who held different religious beliefs, thereby safeguarding their rights as residents of Madinah, and upholding the principle of equal treatment is embedded in the Madinah Charter. The charter further facilitated an environment wherein the residents of Madinah enjoyed the freedom to adhere to their respective faiths, while fostering a spirit of tolerance among various religious communities, recognizing the imperative of forging a robust and harmonious nation.

Therefore, the Qur’anic paradigm of religious freedom emphasizes that an individual’s belief in Allah should be based on their personal conviction and faith, free from any form of coercion by authorities or other parties. Furthermore, engaging in *da’wah* by inviting people to Islam is permissible and in fact, part of human’s responsibilities as a vicegerent on earth, provided that it

⁵¹ Muhammad Tahir ibn ‘Ashur, *Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* (Tunisia: Dar al-Tunis, 1984), 14:327.

adheres to the Qur'anic guidelines, which emphasize wisdom and the provision of meaningful reminders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of social justice revolves primarily around the ideals of freedom, fairness, and solidarity where these notions are significantly reduced in the contemporary era due to the major reliance on secular perspectives rather than divine guidance. As the book of guidance, the Qur'an encompasses the principles of justice, considered of paramount importance for humanity, necessitating its internalization both at the individual and societal level. Even though the social justice problems in the modern century might be challenging to solve, the roles of divine revelations should not be ignored.

A comprehensive examination reveals that the guidance on social justice within the Qur'an emphasizes the paramountcy of upholding human dignity, safeguarding the freedom of individuals, ensuring equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, and honouring and upholding human rights. These principles, inherent within the fabric of social justice, are profoundly relevant to the multifaceted social justice issues that persist in the contemporary era. This study proposes that by appreciating and internalizing Qur'anic teachings, it is possible to address the social justice issues prevalent in the modern era.

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