

Islamic Socio-Ethics for a Just Society: An overview

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Abstract

Religion plays a key role in the development of society. Islam being a major religion in the world looks at all aspects of life, whether socio-political or psycho-social aspects. Islamic laws encompass a wide range of simple but strong solutions to the various current social problems. An attempt is made here to understand the verses of Qur'an and some Hadith of Prophet Mohammad which directly deal with the social aspect.

KEYWORDS: Religion, Islam, Social, Qur'an, Hadith

Introduction

One of the most imperative and significant element of a society is Community Sentiment- a feeling of belonging together. To retain this feeling, a particular group needs defined ethical codes, a sense of moral values to judge between rightness and wrongness of action. In this case, religion is one of the institutions which formulate the shape of other means of social control; it has been a topic of continuous debate since long. Sociologists, socio-biologists and social psychologists have been more concerned in defining relationship between religion and society. Religion plays an important role in shaping a society and directs laws for its betterment in general and human wellbeing in particular. Religion in many societies has been the most influential and effective guide of human behavior. According to W. Robertson, religion is not a vague fear of unknown power, not the child of terror, but rather a relation of all the members of a community to a power that has the good of the community at heart, and protects its laws and moral order. This definition of religion and its importance as an institution to bind all members together and making them live under one roof is of great significance. To quote E. Durkhiem, religion is one of the forces that created within individuals a sense of moral obligations to adhere to society's demands. In fact religion is a very strong tool to overcome all those problems which we cannot solve with the use of our sophisticated scientific tools. Every religion has its own laws for good life and human development in general. Similarly Islam religion has its own principles, etiquettes, moral codes necessary for a social life and just society. Especially from past few decades with the increase in global terrorism, researchers have developed keen interest in the field of social ethics from Islamic point of view because modern misconceptions about Islam have lead to the increased social problems like religious intolerance etc which if not addressed would possibly lead to an increased bedlam among nations, cultures and religions.

Meaning and aim of Just Society

A society as the population seems right. A just society is for the people and not for one's benefit. A just society has no incrimination or crimes (Urban Dictionary). Therefore, the elements which form the basis of a Just Society are Justice, Equal Rights, Ethical Codes, Values, Good Relationships and Geographical Unification. A society has to be Just in the sense that all its members are treated equally without any discrimination on the basis of

color, sex, creed, caste etc. In this case the best example of the notion of Just Society can be found in the speech of former Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau:

The Just Society will be one in which the rights of minorities will be safe from the whims of intolerant majorities. The Just Society will be one in which those regions and groups which have not fully shared in the country's affluence will be given a better opportunity. The Just Society will be one where such urban problems as housing and pollution will be attacked through the application of new knowledge and new techniques. The Just Society will be one in which our Indian and Inuit populations will be encouraged to assume the full rights of citizenship through policies which will give them both greater responsibility for their own future and more meaningful equality of opportunity. The Just Society will be a united Canada, united because all of its citizens will be actively involved in the development of a country where equality of opportunity is ensured and individuals are permitted to fulfill themselves in the fashion they judge best [1]. Social Integration is a momentous formula to maintain peace and harmony in a society.

Islam: Ethics, Faith and Morality in action for a Just Society

Islamic concept of Akhlaq (ethics) deals with the standards like human disposition, character, manners, duties and virtues. In addition it includes rights and attitudes of all human beings towards each other. In Islam ethics is based on faith, linked to the teachings of Qur'an and Hadith. The word Akhlaq (ethics), Khaliq (creator) and Makhluq (creation) are closely related to each other, assumes a good relationship between human beings and between God and people [2]. Therefore ethics in Islam encompasses all spheres and walks of life which include social, political and economical rights and equalities without making any distinction on the basis of colour, caste, creed etc.

Society in Islam is of great importance and significance. It has been a central topic of discourse for Islamic scholars since a long; especially current social predicaments have ushered in more forceful demands for looking at the society as whole to resolve issues. Islam sees life in totality. Islam does not only focus on one's fundamental beliefs -one God, Prophets, Angels, Scripture and Day of Judgment rather lays great emphasis on a set of personal obligations to community and abiding by a set of social and moral conduct [3].

Islamic law (Shariah) is rich in moral teachings ranging from small division of belief of removing something harmful from the path of the people to the highest division of having belief in one God (tauhid). This includes beliefs, worship, dealings and moral framework stating the principles of rules of conduct and etiquette for a polite society [4]. Ash-Shatibi an Andalusian Sunni Islamic Scholar says, "The Shariah in its entirety only creates noble morals". Shariah encompasses the whole of human life, individual as well as social.[5] and are thus to be accepted by all the believers regardless of race, sex, color, rank or any other difference [6] binds all believers together to live under one roof. Thus comes up with the concept of Umma- a nation without boundaries, a community of believers and a best example of geographical unification. Qur'an establishes social unity in the following verse to eradicate caste system, coercive authority on the basis of worldly differences. O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and

tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most of honorable among you in sight of Allah is that (believer) who has piety and righteousness ¹

This makes the dialogue and respect possible and promotes collaboration on issues of human flourishing and a responsibility to promote social equality. The main purpose is the betterment, welfare and prosperity of mankind. Based on this moral law, a good social life is motivated. Thus Qur'an clearly assigns a very important place to social unity and harmony. The other important elements for a better society are justice, friendship, good neighborliness. The Qur'anic concept of justice is quite different; it is the use of natural power of man within limits prescribed by moral laws. Justice is absolute and is to be dispensed without any qualifications [7] and bias. Qur'an says: O Believers, be you the standard-bearers of justice and witnesses for the sake of Allah, even though your justice and your evidence might be harmful to yourselves, or to your parents, or to your relatives. It does not matter whether the party concerned is rich or poor: Allah is their greater well-wisher than you; therefore, do not follow your own desire lest you should deviate from doing justice. If you distort your evidence or refrain from the truth, know it well that Allah is fully aware of what you do².

Eminent Islamic scholar and jurist Maulana Maududi in his Tafseer (Qur'anic Interpretation) says- The words, "be you the standard-bearers of justice", are very significant. They imply, "You not only have to do justice but have also to bear the standard of justice in order to eradicate injustice and establish right and justice in its place. As Believers, you have to gird up your loins to support justice, whenever your support is needed. "The sole aim of your testimony should be to please Allah, without any tinge of partiality, self-interest, fear or favor in it." Again the following verse makes justice an obligation and forbids injustice: Allah enjoins justice, generosity and kind treatment with kindred, and forbids indecency, wickedness and oppression³

Maulana Maududi's interpretation of the verse makes the clear explanation of justice. He says that the sound society depends on justice, generosity and kind treatment, enjoined by Allah the creator. However in case of justice he says justice does not mean equal distribution of rights, for that would be absolutely unnatural. In fact, justice means equitable dispensation of rights which in certain cases may mean equality. For example, all citizens should have equal rights of citizenship but in other cases equality in rights would be injustice. For instance, equality in social status and rights between parents and their children will obviously be wrong. Likewise those who render services of superior and inferior types cannot be equal in regard to wages and salaries. What Allah enjoins is that the full rights of everyone should be honestly rendered whether those be moral, social, economic legal or political in accordance with what one justly deserves. Chain of verses from Quran conveying message of justice to be established on the surface of the earth continues as such: O Believers, be steadfast in righteousness and just in giving witnesses for the sake of Allah; the enmity of any people should not so provoke you as to turn you away from justice. Do justice for it is akin to piety. Fear Allah (in your affairs): indeed He is fully aware of what you do⁴. We sent Our Messengers with clear signs and instructions and sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that the people may stand by justice⁵

The goal of all the revelation sent before Quran (such as Tawrah, Zabur and Injil) also have been sent down with the clear message of establishing justice among the people. Although the routes are not clearly specified but general guidelines are clear. Justice is to

be established as per the revelation and any methods which is against it, is forbidden. [8] Another important thing to make a society just according to the teachings of Qur'an is to be just to the neighbours. Islam clearly defines rights of neighbours for a just society. It has great respect for the mutual rights and duties of neighbors. To have a good and morally well society, Islam in its basic principles defines rights of neighbors. Both Qur'an and Hadith lay emphasis on living together in a peaceful way with neighbors. The neighbor holds a special status in Islam. Islam encourages Muslims to treat their neighbors in a gentle way that reflects the true and genuine spirit of Islam as exemplified in its tolerant aspect especially with people of other faiths. It makes no difference whether the neighbors are Muslim or non-Muslim. Qur'an reads: and be good to the neighbor who is your relative and to the neighbor who is not a relative⁶. Prophet Muhammad has said anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should be good to his neighbours. Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should be generous to his guest. Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should say what is good or be silent⁷. Prophet was heard saying that, Jibril (Angel) kept on recommending that I treat my neighbours well until I thought that he would order me to treat them as my heirs⁸. This Hadith was reported by other companions as well e.g., Ibn Umar⁹ and Mujahid¹⁰ reported that (on the basis of the later part of Hadith stating the right of inheritance) that one should distribute the part of eatables among his neighbours before eating, Ibn 'Abbas¹¹ Abu Dharr^{12,13}. Prophet said that one should not fornicate with neighbour's wife and steal things from their house, since it is unlawful¹⁴. For a Muslim, neighbour is not only a Muslim but a non Muslim as well¹⁵ and it is not good to hurt them¹⁶. Good neighbourliness being a moral virtue and a social value creates harmony, peaceful coexistence irrespective of faith, colour, sex etc. [9] Furthermore neighbours have been classified into three categories: that one who has got one right upon you, that one who has got two rights upon you, that one who has got three rights upon you. The neighbor having one right is the one who is neither a Muslim nor a relative. Still he has got all the claims of neighborhood-rights upon you. The neighbor having two rights is the one who is either a non-Muslim or a non-relative Muslim. The neighbor having three rights upon you is the one who is also a Muslim and a relative [10].

Conclusion

Although we are in a period of sophisticated technology, information and geographical unification, even then we see around us aggression in the name of creed and religion. Especially when it comes to the point of religious discussion and religions role in a particular society, we find numerous answers stating religion as an institution of intolerance, backbone of social problems like riots, mass killings, terrorism etc but in reality it is quite different. In this case if we are to be more specific, we find Islam one of the most misunderstood religions. Islam despite being the most progressive, logical and scientific religion on this planet is also the most misunderstood religion, due to certain eventual facts. But now all these misunderstandings have diverted many minds towards Islam. Islam as is clear from its name is the religion of peace and tolerance and is clear from many Qur'anic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad. During the past few decades there have been many controversies and conflicts between Muslims, Christian and Jews, giving rise to many riots but on the other hand a Muslim is not allowed to indulge in any such activity. The fact that our society is evil subjugated where we face problems ranging from abusing anyone or anything to brutal human killings in the name

of religion, politics, region etc, it is need of the hour to rethink the Islamic teachings, since the Islamic teachings inspire the best forms of constructive and creative work, pursuit of common good is one of the fundamental aspects of Islamic teachings, efforts to improve education, political ideals and particularly social conditions. A Muslim is not supposed to spread hatred, terrorism, and discrimination on the basis or in the name of religion, since there is no room for disunity, fragmentation and hostility in the name of religion, is a sin totally inconsistent with Islamic teachings and beliefs.

Notes:

1. Al-Qur'an (49:13).
2. *Ibid* (4:135)
3. *Ibid* (16:90)
4. *Ibid* (5:8)
5. *Ibid* (57:25)
6. *Ibid* (4:36)
7. Adab Al Mufrad, Imam Al Bukhari, Hadith No (102)
8. *Ibid* (101)
9. *Ibid* (104)
10. *Ibid* (105)
11. *Ibid* (112)
12. *Ibid* (113)
13. *Ibid* (114)
14. *Ibid* (103)
15. *Ibid* (128)
16. *Ibid* 119)

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