

## Human Dignity and its consequences in the Holy Quran

**Irshad Ahmad**

Research scholar, Department Of Philosophy, Agra College, Agra, (U.P) India

---

### Abstract

Human dignity is one of the most important issues in the realm of anthropology and has brought about different approaches in different divine and human religions. It is a frequent and very important theme in religious moral perspectives. In the theistic religious schools, human dignity has a real source in the God's will. There are valuable fundamentals of human dignity presented in divine religions especially in the self-evident Muslim religion as well as in the holly book of the Muslims, and Muhammad's tradition in particular. Its strong interconnections with human right issues, makes it inexorable to analyze, explain and redefine it in the light of Quranic teachings. However, there are few researches on the limits and boundaries of human dignity in the Islamic history.

**KEYWORDS:** Quran, Human dignity, human right, dignity and just character

---

### Introduction

Human dignity is the recognition and respect of human need, desire and expectation one individual by another. This recognition is indispensable because no human being survives alone. Human dignity creates the foundation of society and civilization. Our knowledge of, history suggests that religious ideas have provided this basic foundation of civilization.

All human beings possess equal human dignity as their birthright and enjoy the right of access to God equally, because He is equally the God of all. And because He is nearer to every human being than his jugular vein, no one needs any priest or priestess in his dealings with Him. He is Himself the Bestower of all Blessings on whomsoever He considers worthy; He Himself judges and forgives the sins of whomsoever He seems deserving; to Him belongs the Absolute Sovereignty and His contact with everyone is direct and constant. God's unambiguous proclamation runs through the holy book: "Call on Me; I will answer your (Prayer) ..."

Coming to human beings: God, the One, has created them all; and He originated the existence of the human species on the earth through one original pair of man and woman. This gives us the Quranic principle of the Unity of Mankind, in which all prejudices of race, colour, caste and sex are obliterated and the only principle of distinction in respect of status is achievement in terms of spiritual and moral character and knowledge. As regards respect for human dignity, it is, in the Quranic view, the birthright of every human being. With reference to the human personality, the Holy Quran emphasizes its organic wholeness. The human being is a unitary being, with the soul, the mind and the body and their different dimensions of existence and behaviour, forming an integrated organic Whole—a Unity. This Quranic view gives rise to the Quranic ideal of the integration, wherein all the dimensions of human personality: the physical, the moral, the rational, the aesthetical and the spiritual, have to be developed

comprehensively and harmoniously in order to achieve the Divine Purpose with regard to human destiny.

The Quranic vision of human dignity is manifested in various ways and in different contexts. To begin with, we read the direct and unqualified affirmation of the dignity of man in the following Quranic text, where God Most High declares:

**“We have bestowed dignity on the progeny of Adam (laqad karramna bani Adama) ... and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our creation.” (al-Isra’, 17:70)**

The verse then continues to remind the whole of mankind of God’s special favor unto them with physical and intellectual abilities, natural resources and with superiority over most other creatures in the world. This dignity is bestowed through God’s act of creating Adam and breathing into him His Own Spirit. Since all human beings originated from Adam and his spouse, every single human being possesses this dignity regardless of color, race, religion and tribe. The whole of mankind, as *khalīfah* (vice-regent) is responsible for establishing peace on earth through divinely ordained values such as *amānah* (trust), *‘adālah* (justice) and *shūra* (consultation).

According to al-Alusi, ‘everyone and all members of the human race, including the pious and the sinner are endowed with dignity, nobility and honour, which cannot be exclusively expounded and identified. Ibn ‘Abbas has commented, however, that God Most High has honoured mankind by endowing him with the faculty of reason.’

Dignity in other words is not earned by meritorious conduct; it is an expression of God’s favour and grace. Mustafa al-Siba’i and Hasan al-Ili have similarly remarked that dignity is a proven right of every human being regardless of colour, race or religion. Ahmad Yusri has drawn the conclusion that ‘dignity is established for every human being as of the moment of birth’. Sayyid Qutb has similarly stated that dignity is the natural right of every individual. The children of Adam have been honoured not for their personal attributes or status in society, but for the fact that they are human beings. ‘Dignity is therefore the absolute right of everyone.

The Quranic declaration of dignity for the whole of the human race in the foregoing ayah has, in another place, been more specifically endorsed with reference to the Muslims. The dignified status (al-izza) of the believers is thus expounded alongside that of God Most High and His Messenger, Muhammad:

**“And honour (al-izza) belongs to God, to His Messenger and the believers” (al-Munafiqun, 63:8).**

On a more general note, the Prophet Mohammad (s.a.w) declared in a hadith that ‘people are God’s children and those dearest to God are the ones who treat His children kindly’. The Quran and Sunnah normally refer to people as God’s servants (‘ibad Allah), but here they are elevated to the status of God’s beloved children, which naturally conveys a more dignified status.

In the physical world, according to the worldview of Islam, there is no place on earth holier than the House of God, the Ka’ba. Yet the Prophet drew the following parallel to express the extent of the dignity of the believers. The Prophet, while facing the Ka’ba, said:

**“You are most pure and most dignified, but by the One in whose hands Muhammad’s life reposes, the sanctity and honour of a believer, his life and his property, is far greater than yours in the eyes of God.”**

These clear affirmations of the dignity of man are in turn endorsed in a variety of other contexts in the Quran and Sunnah, one of which is the basic unity in the creation of mankind, and its equality in the eyes of the Creator.

In the Islamic tradition there is a belief that man has been blessed with divine spirit and this is the main cause of human dignity. Man’s dignity has promoted his position to that of the vicegerent of God on earth. However, Muslim thinkers have expressed different views on human rights matters, in general, and inherent dignity, in particular. A number of Muslim thinkers believe that the modern concept of human rights has originated from valuable sources of religious and philosophical teachings. We learned that dignity is the foundation of human rights and the concept of inherent human dignity can only be justified in the light of religious teachings. Unity of humanity and human family is one of the basic concepts of Islam and the Holy Quran considers the diversity of people in language and color as a sign of God and therefore, these differences should not be a basis of superiority of one over another.

“O mankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-wary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware”. (Al-Hujurat:13)

On the one hand, this verse has emphasized on the unity of humankind which results in the equality of all men and on the other hand, it declares that as per religious teachings there is another type of dignity that should be acquired through sincere belief and good deeds. One should either admit the existence of inherent dignity or deny it, whereas the acquired dignity, varies from one individual to another according to which, one may become nearer to the Lord and more dignified before God.

Accepting people's rights in human societies and commitment not to violate them are necessary to maintain human dignity. A human outside a society has the right for dignity in his/her personal life and accepting and protecting this right is necessary and obligatory. Here in this article, we have stated the requirements for protecting human dignity and rights.

### **The right to life**

Human being has inherent dignity and deserves to gain virtues which all necessitate having the right to life and personal safety since these virtues emerge and appear in social life only. The right to life, freedom and personal safety recognized in the third provision of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as the basis of all related political and civil freedoms including freedom from slavery, arbitrary torture and capture and fair trial-related rights, freedom of expression and travelling (immigration), avoiding interference in private lives, the acquaintance principle (people's innocence before their guilt is proven), the right to marriage and having a family and the freedom of their beliefs and the like mentioned in the 3rd to 21st provisions of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Johnson, 1999, pp 91-93). These rights are observed in Islamic wisdom's viewpoint based on human dignity principle. Since human being has inherent dignity, his safety cannot be taken away and he cannot be deprived of his/her individual and social

rights unless he/she is found criminal in a court of justice. From the view of divine wisdom, not only nobody has the right to kill someone else, but also no one is allowed to kill himself or his children, whether a son or a daughter, due to poverty or ignorant bias and take the divine endowment away from himself or others (Al- An'am:151). Human's most important right is the right to life and other rights originate from this life.

The Quran as well as Sunna protect right to life, wealth and prestige and ensure a free society in which no one, even the non-Muslim, shall be deprived of life, property, and honour without due procedure of law. These instructions have been repeated in the Holy Quran in:

**Do not kill a soul which Allah has made sacred except through the due process of law ... (6:151)**

Human life is sacred and a gift from Allah, the Creator. For the protection of human life Islam has legislated capital and corporal punishments and retribution unto those transgressing criminals who murder and physically harm others. The Qur'an upholds the sanctity and absolute value of human life and points out that, in essence, the life of each individual is comparable to that of an entire community and, therefore, should be treated with the utmost care.

#### **The right to freedom**

Freedom is a person's ability to do something or abstain from it based upon her own free will. It is a special quality enjoyed by every rational human being. With it, a person acts without the interference of others, because that person is not owned by anyone; not on the individual level, or on the level of the state, society, etc.

Islam gives the right to freedom of conscience and conviction to its citizens. The Holy Quran has laid down the injunction:

**"There should be no coercion in the matter of faith" (Quran 2:256).**

The freedom that Islam grants is based on commitment and responsibility without which there can be no true freedom. Freedom without restraints leads only to nihilism, the consequence of which is the complete breakdown of the moral and social order.

By freedom, the Quran does not mean uncontrolled absolute as anybody can do whatever he likes. Freedom of will and action based on passionate desires is exactly like unscrupulousness and wickedness but not human freedom since such decision making and acting is an invasion of privacy or kind of limiting or jeopardizing others' freedom.

In Qazali's opinion, only the orders by God who possesses creation and command deserve obedience and obligation and they are commands from an owner to what is owned that should be followed and thus there is no creator save God who is the only one deserving command and decision (Qarzavi, 2000, p 102). As result, what Muslims infer from the 40th verse of Yusuf surah, "The decision rests with Allah only ..." is that ruling belongs to God and humans should obey Him completely. This does not mean there should not be any governments among people and we should just consider that God is the ruler; rather, God has created humans free and talented with different tastes in life and people are thus free in using their talents and making use of different visions; they may even have different understandings and deductions about religion which itself may cause conflicts

and chaos in societies as any group or person may only accept his own idea and taste and only agree to develop their own. Accordingly, building societies and civil lives is a part of human nature which will naturally lead to disagreements. The ruling God mentions in the 40th verse of Yusuf Surah is a religious government or the government of divine rules and regulations conveyed to people through prophets especially God's last messenger, Mohammed (PBUH). Basically, does God govern or rule human societies directly? Shouldn't people of human kind take control of the affairs based on God's commands (Makarem Shirazi, 1994, vol. 9, p 419).

The irresponsible concept of freedom expounded by existentialism, democracy and modern theories of freedom of expression lead only to corruption and immorality since they are not tied to any concept higher moral values or self control. For Islam, freedom lies in commitment and responsibility. They form an integral part of each other and can in no way be separated. There is no freedom of choice without responsibility; no responsibility without freedom.

### **The right to religiosity**

Religiosity is one human's most important right after the rights to life and freedom i.e. each human has the right to enjoy spiritual life since life without religiosity is a monotonous and unchanging life with no dynamism or move towards perfection (An-Nisa: 136). Religiosity is a right for all humans and perhaps gaining this right is one of the reasons for the obligation of crusade for God's sake, martyrdom on the way to boost up the term 'Allah' and fight with foes to protect the religion. However, this right is in no conflict with the freedom of belief but confirms it as it is explicated in the Qur'an that freedom in selecting and practicing a religion is humans' undeniable right – "There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error" (Al-Baqarah:256). Others cannot be forced to choose a religion or beliefs and incline towards a particular way because belief is a matter of heart and compulsion is not effective (Yunus:99) since admitting the right religion is institutionalized in human nature and God has made human nature lean towards it (Ar-Rum:30).

### **Conclusion**

After emphasizing human dignity and its effects and consequences in human life, the present article emphasized the following points and regards them as the results of human dignity in the Noble Qur'an.

Human dignity, which has had a significant effect on the moral, juridical and sociopolitical issues of the today's world, is one of the accepted values in divine and human doctrines. The present era which is called the defending human rights and dignity, needs to modify and revise the concept, effects and requirements of human dignity more than ever.

In Qur'an's view, mankind has dignity inherently and God has put the crown of dignity on all humans unless somebody disturb his own dignity with his own behavior. Since Islam recognizes human dignity, the requirements and consequences of human dignity are paid attention to in Muslim rules and regulations and there is no rule incompatible with human dignity in Muslim rules.

The rights to life, freedom, religiosity and the fair enjoyment of social advantages are the requirements for human dignity in Qur'an's view and nobody has the right to harm or threaten human dignity and its consequences.

## REFERENCES

- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary. Washington, DC: Amanah, 1989.
- Ali, Shaheen Sardar. Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law: Equal Before Allah, Unequal Before Man? The Hague: Kluwer Law International.2002
- Ali, Syed Ameer. The Spirit of Islam: A History of the Evolution and Ideals of Islam, with a Life of the Prophet. London: Chatto & Windus, 1978.
- Afkhami, Mahnaz, ed. Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- An-Na'im, Abdullahi Ahmed. Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996.
- Shultziner D. A Jewish conception of human dignity. Journal of Religious Ethics 2007; 34 (4): 663 -683.
- Kamali M.H. The Dignity of Man: An Islamic perspective (Fundamental Rights and Liberties in Islam). Islamic Texts Society 2002.
- M. Pouyandeh, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, translated by ,Tehran, Nei Publications, fourth print,1998
- Fazlollah, Seyyed Hossein (1419 BC), my interpretation of the Quran's revelation, Beirut: Daralmlak Lltbah and Alnashr.
- Mayer, Ann Elizabeth. Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 3rd ed., 1999.
- Moussalli, Ahmad S. The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001.