



Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Raheem

[In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful]

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Social Justice in Islam

“In civilised life, law floats in a sea of ethics,” wrote Earl Warren, Chief Justice, US Supreme Court, on 12 November 1962.

If any society does not have ethics on human values and social justice, it is certainly a very shallow society, driven by basic animal instincts. Social justice has been preached and practised by God’s Messengers¹ to bring about a quality of life that differentiates people from animals.² Once people are given to enjoy acceptable quality of life, they will appreciate that God’s love and compassion³ goes out to all people, regardless of ethnicity.⁴

People should appreciate that God provided distinct variety in almost every way – including varieties of people and cultures.⁵ Social justice also raises the question: Who is your neighbour? In proper and honest discharge of peoples’ rights and privileges, it also comes to consideration, that all people are not endowed with similarities. There are some people who need assistance, such as being dependant on charity. This should come about regardless whether the beneficiary is of same ethnicity.⁶

On the contrary, history unfolds that oppression has been practised for centuries without any regard for social justice. We have scripture accounts of Hebrews enslaved in Egypt.⁷ They were suffering without social justice and the main cause of their suffering was the simple fact: They were Hebrews and not Egyptians.⁸ The Egyptians were indigenous communities and Hebrews were settlers in Egypt. The consequence of atrocities that the Egyptians inflicted against the Hebrews has gone down in history.⁹

In any country of this world, people must have rights to believe in God and practice any religion whatsoever.¹⁰ In addition to having rights of worship, there must also be gender equality. Often we see women getting marginalized. This should not be so and women have equal rights to social justice.¹¹ Children

¹ 57:27. Holy Qur’an. “Then We made Our messengers to follow the footsteps, and We made Jesus son of Mary to follow, and We gave him the Gospel. And We put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him.”

² 4:135. Holy Qur’an. “O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for God, even though it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives – whether he be rich or poor, God has a better right over them both.”

³ 110:3. Holy Qur’an. “Celebrate the praise of thy Lord and ask His protection. Surely He is ever Returning (to mercy).”

⁴ 5:2. Holy Qur’an. “And let not hatred of a people incite you to transgress. And help one another in righteousness and piety, and help not one another in sin and aggression, and keep you duty to God.”

⁵ 12:38. Holy Qur’an. “And I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. This is by God’s grace upon us and mankind, but most people give not thanks.”

⁶ 46: 35. Holy Qur’an. “So have patience, as men of resolution, the messengers, had patience, and seek not to hasten on for them (their doom).”

⁷ (1) Exodus Chapters 1-14. Holy Bible and (2) Holy Qur’an Chapter 7 vv-100-141.

⁸ 20:130. Holy Qur’an. “So bear patiently with what they say, and celebrate the praise of thy Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting, and glorify (Him) during the hours of the night and parts of the day, that thou mayest be well pleased.”

⁹ 42:41. Holy Qur’an. “And whoever defends himself after his being oppressed, these it is against whom there is no way (of blame).”

¹⁰ 22:40. Holy Qur’an. “Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is God. And if God did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which God’s name is much remembered would have been pulled down. And surely God will help him who helps Him. Surely God is Strong, Mighty.”

¹¹ 2:228. Holy Qur’an. “And women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner.....”

are similarly marginalized and they are not advantaged to fend for their rights. This therefore concludes that due recognition must be given to rights of all people under a central governance¹² of democratic administration.¹³ Respecting rights and dignity of the individual becomes a natural expectation.

Tolerance is an issue that differs from community to community. Some people are more tolerant and some are lesser. It does not conclude that since a community is more tolerant then they are doomed to be marginalized.¹⁴

Hurting another society because that other society is better at whatever skills is a most deplorable situation. This happens in many societies as seen regularly in media and documented by the United Nations. Perhaps, the atrocities given to hurt the Hebrew community in Egypt before Moses rescued them, the holocaust against Jews in Germany in WW II and the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia recently are vivid memories of situations where social justice was no longer recognised and practised.¹⁵

Forgiveness should be exercised if forgiveness¹⁶ will mend the matter and do well to the wrongdoer himself.¹⁷

However, the golden rule is that evil must be requited by punishment proportionate to the intensity of the harm done. Reconciliation is the other side of the equation that proposes that justice must be seen to be done.

1. **What does my religious tradition understand social justice to mean?** It is understood to mean human values in fairness, equality, recognition of existence of other ethnic groups to live in a harmonious multi-cultural mix in which no one society claims superiority over the other groups.
2. **What are the theological and scripture understandings that form the basis of my organisation's response to social justice?** These have already been discussed at length in the deliberations given above. All prophets came from God as Ambassadors with same Divine Messages. Successive Messengers clarified same fundamental issues to suit modern civilisations.
3. **Is religion used to maintain situations of injustice? Does religion justify injustices?** Religion was never meant to project injustice of any kind. Some religious and some political leaders have taken advantage of the sensitivity of religious beliefs to incite recognition of ethnic differences.
4. **What efforts are being made to overcome injustices? In what ways is your organisation involved in social justice?** Globally, this society's religious leaders are taking recognition to obvious ethnic polarisations in some parts of the world and giving further recognition that unscrupulous political leaders are using religion to gain political mileage. The society's leaders are using excerpts from scripture to build bridges of understanding between different religious and ethnic groups, to eradicate disunity and promote equality and fairness to all.

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¹² 42:38. Holy Qur'an. "And those who respond to their Lord and keep up prayer, and whose affairs are (decided) by counsel among themselves, and who spend out of what We have given them."

¹³ 42: 42-43. Holy Qur'an. "The way (of blame) is only against those who oppress men and revolt in the earth unjustly. For such there is a powerful chastisement. And whoever is patient and forgives – that surely is an affair of great resolution."

¹⁴ 38:26. Holy Qur'an. "O David, surely We have made thee a ruler in the land; so judge between men justly, and follow not desire, lest it lead thee astray from the path of God."

¹⁵ 60:8. Holy Qur'an. "God forbids you not respecting those you fight you not for religion, and drive you forth from your homes, that you show them kindness and deal with them justly. Surely God loves the doers of justice."

¹⁶ 42:40. Holy Qur'an. "...but whoever forgives and amends, his reward is with God. Surely he loves not the wrong doers."

¹⁷ 2:109. Holy Qur'an. "But pardon and forgive, till God brings about His command. Surely God is possessor of power over all things."