



Islamic Concept of Social Justice

For a Muslim, ﷻ the centre of his universe, being always conscious of His Omni-presence. As such He deserves all the attention and devotion, unconditional obedience and service. In one word, ﷻ is to be loved. The Glorious Quran alludes to this when it says "The believers dearly love Allah." (Surah Al-Baqarah: ayah 165)

The Prophet ﷺ once said, 'the whole of creation is the family of Allah' and because of this metaphysical relationship it too (the creation) deserves to be loved and served. An expression of this love for Allah's creation is to be just and fair towards it.

What is a just person? "A just person strives constantly to give others what is their due, so that they can fulfil their duties and exercise their rights as persons (the right to life, to cultural and moral goods to material goods) as parents, as children, as citizens, as workers, as rulers etc. and he also tries to see what others do likewise." David Isaac – Character Building, Four Courts Press.

Social justice is an important virtue which enables people to respect one another's rights and to fulfil their duties. Justice creates harmony, through respect or one another leading to peace. The equation is simple: justice equals peace whilst injustice leads to inequalities, social tension and wars. The Quran uses two different words for justice and fairness; Qist (25 times) and 'Adl (32 times). The above verse clearly urges people to be firm and resolute in dispensing justice, uncompromising and unwilling to give it up. Even if it means standing up against parents and relatives, against a powerful and wealthy person, or a pitiful beggar. We are reminded that "Allah has better right over both." There are three stages in dispensing justice:

- i. **Otherness:** Justice is done only in respect to other persons. A person can break someone's car, that is an unfair act until he remedies it by fixing it for him. However, if he broke his own car, no injustice has been done.
- ii. **Strict Right:** One must recognise others 'right' and the debt he owes. Justice is about paying exactly what is owed. This is why justice is tough.
- iii. **Equality:** This refers to perfect parity between what is owed and what is given. For an act to be just there should be neither more nor less. It is here where one can see the difficulty of dispensing justice. How can

the victim of rape be compensated? How can the victims of the Holocaust be compensated by money? How can the Palestinians displaced from their homes be compensated?

The creation of a just society has been one of the prime goals of Islam, all the messengers of God fought against the social injustices of their time. They endeavoured to overcome tyranny and exploitation and guaranteed dignity and the freedom of man.

In all of Islamic history the justice of Umar رضي الله عنه the second Caliph is legendary. Once, a fiery dispute erupted between the son of the Governor of Egypt and a Coptic. The Coptic had been unfairly dealt with so he complained to the Caliph, who after listening to both sides, punished the Governor's son.

As citizens we too have responsibilities in creating a just society. In this connection we should bear in mind that generalisations and blind criticism are an act of injustice. Spreading rumours, defamation and describing others as enemies is unfair. What we are trying to develop is the desire to be just. The Quran emphasises this virtue and urges Muslims to adopt it wholly. Another example of social injustice is the third world debt, this is a gross injustice and it can be linked to the slave trade. The African and Asian countries in debt are enslaved to the rich countries of the west. Most of these countries, the Gross National Product (GNP) being spent on paying off the interest on the loan and as a consequence the health and educational standards of the country suffer. The poor are the most affected!

"Believers remain steadfast with justice and be true witnesses for Allah, even though it be against yourselves, your parents or your relatives or whether against rich or poor, know Allah has better right over both, so do not be led by passion lest you should swerve from the truth. And if you lapse away then surely Allah is fully aware of what you do."
(Surah An-Nisa, Ayah 135)