

Q) "Islam teaches the lesson of human respect and dignity irrespective of colour, race and creed." Discuss

Introduction

Human dignity is a term which refers to the status or value of being a human being. It provides that all humans have an intrinsic worth due to which they have recognition and respect, and cannot be used as a mere means to an end. This concept functions across all domains of human life, from social to individual, economic to political, legal to moral and so on. The primary source of this principle is the Din of Allah (SWT), Islam, which covers every aspect of human existence and ensures the dignity and respect of every individual by discarding the fictional barriers created by mankind such as colour, race and creed. Islam provides rights to individuals (Human Rights) and attaches those rights with duties (Haqooq-ul-Abad) to guarantee their universal application. As Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) asserted:

"... [The best Muslim is]
the one from whose hand and
tongue all Muslims are safe."
(Bukhari)

Considering this, this paper begins by discussing the concept of human rights in Islam and

how it promotes human dignity and respect. It then compares the Western conception of human rights with the Islamic concept. Finally, by drawing on the failures of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the British Magna Carta (1215) and the American Constitution, it argues that the proper application of the Islamic conception of human rights is ^{the} only ^{way} ~~capable~~ of bridging the artificial and discriminatory barriers created by humankind.

Islam: The Guarantor of Fundamental Human Rights

1400 years ago, Islam laid down an ideal code of human rights, aimed at upholding the dignity of all human beings and eliminating injustice, oppression and exploitation. In Islam, human rights come directly from Allah Almighty due to which they can neither be amended nor revoked by a monarch, legislature or any other authority. This special status given to human rights in Islam is also being adopted by the West. For instance, Anthony Lester, in his book, *Five Ideas to Fight For: How our Freedom is Under Threat and Why it Matters* (2016) ~~stresses~~ stresses:

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"Human rights are not gift of government. They are our birthright."

(Anthony Lester)

Islam: Promoting Human & Dignity and Respect via Human Rights

a) Right to Life

"Whoever takes a life, unless as a punishment for murder or mischief in the land, it will be as if they killed all of humanity."

(Al-Quran, 5:32)

Under Islam, because it is Allah (swt) who has given life to humans, we must act according to His Guidance. Islam does not permit an individual to take the life of his/her ^{counterpart} ~~individual~~ in retaliation for murder or corruption. It only gives this authority to ^{the} competent courts of law. This, therefore, eliminates the superiority of one individual over another ~~by~~ as the only sovereign is Allah Almighty and it ~~is~~ His Guidance that a true believer must always comply with.

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b) Right to Equality

The Din of Allah (SWT) does not make distinctions based on colour, race, creed and like factors but unites Muslims through their relationship with Allah (SWT). For instance, while Islam does not forbid individual prayer, it encourages Muslims to pray in a communal setting (mosque), shoulder to shoulder and all gathered in rows facing the Holy Kabah. Due to this, Kenneth Crass, in his article, Islam and the Muslim (1987) describes Muslims as the "People of the Point." This is because, this creates a geometric pattern of humans, all faced towards one point - a unique feature in world's religious history manifesting the oneness and awesomeness of Allah (SWT) in human affairs to establish unity.

In addition to this, the Glorious Quran ~~not~~ advocates the rights of slaves. At the time when the Book of Allah (SWT) was revealed, slavery was widespread and it was Islam which not only insisted the just and humane treatment of slaves but also their emancipation. The right to equality is best captured by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who in his farewell sermon declared that:

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" Righteous actions are the only mark of distinction, and not wealth, birth, or status in life."

c) Dignity of Human Beings:
Zero Tolerance for ~~Gender~~
Discrimination

Islam provides all human beings freedom regardless of their gender, religion, colour and like factors. This protection of equal status of men and women, rich and poor, of all nations and cultures is of great significance to Islam. For example, Allah Almighty has made the violation of a woman's chastity a serious offence.

" Do not approach the bounds of adultery."
(Al-Quran, 17:32)

Since the advent of Islam, these rights have been preserved for both the Muslims and non-Muslims, and ~~is~~ ^{are} a great blessing for the anthropogenic race.

d) Right to Education

Allah Almighty has made education mandatory for every single human being as those who have no education can neither prosper in their worldly affairs

nor can the meanings of revelation become manifest to them. Therefore, those who do not understand and lack knowledge are worse than cattle (Al-Quran, 7:179).

e) Right to Earn

"For men is the benefit of what they earn. And for women is the benefit of what they earn."

(Al-Quran, 4:32)

The Din of Allah (SWT) gives everyone the right to work and places an obligation on the Islamic state to provide jobs to the unemployed. For instance, whenever a needy person visited the Holy Prophet (PBUH) for help, rather than giving him/her money (a temporary solution), he used to help them establish business. Once Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave some coins to a person and told him to purchase an axe, cut wood and sell it. The man returned to the Prophet (PBUH) after 15 days and had earned 10 silver coins. This, thus, means that Allah (SWT) does not merely order humans to seek education, but also provides guidance ~~for~~ ~~affording~~ to become self-sufficient and thus be able to afford education.

f) Right to Justice and Protest Against Injustice and Oppression

"God Commands justice and fair dealing."

(Al-Quran, 16:90)

Islam gives citizens of an Islamic State ^{the right} to resist and protest against injustice and oppression. This helps ensure that the rights of all human beings as conferred on them by Allah Almighty are respected.

g) Freedom of Expression

Under Islam, all human beings are afforded freedom of expression as long as it is used to spread virtue and truth and not vice and evil. This is especially applicable in guiding people to the right path, Islam. Thus, if a government deprives citizens of their rights and violates their dignity, Islam encourages Muslims to protest ~~at~~ against the government of hypocrites.

The Islamic Concept of Human Rights vs the Western Concept

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Three of the most prominent documents on human rights are the UDHR, Magna Carta and the American Constitution. However, all of the three hold little to no value when compared with the farewell sermon of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), "The Seal of all Prophets" (Al-Quran, 33:40) where he directed his followers to uphold the fundamental rights of every human being. This has even been acknowledged by some of the Western writers such as Robert Briffault who in *The Making of Humanity* (1915) stated that the French Revolution and the Declaration of Rights drew inspiration from the Noble Quran.

Further, the ~~one~~ claim that the concept of human rights was introduced by Magna Carta rests on a fallacy given that Islam predates it by 600 years and no one was aware before the 17th century that the Magna Carta contained the principle of Trial by Jury (Habeas Corpus).

Apart from this, the current state of affairs suggest that efforts of these documents in eradicating discrimination and upholding the dignity of every human being have failed. For example, in India, Muslims ~~have~~ ^{are being} ~~been~~ subjected to genocide

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Since the past few ~~centuries~~ ^{decades} and yet the United Nations has failed to put an end to it (A mere spectator).

These so-called documents on human rights cannot, ^{thus,} be compared with the rights conferred by Allah (SWT). The former applies discriminately while the latter (Islam) is applicable at all times and to all. Thus, it is only Islam which is capable of eliminating the discriminatory barriers created by mankind and upholding the respect and dignity of all.

Conclusion

In Conclusion, discriminatory measures created by mankind are strictly opposed by Islam. The Din of Allah (SWT) provides fundamental human rights which promote respect and dignity for all humans regardless of their colour, race, creed and like factors. It helps unite Muslims via their relationship with Allah, advocates equality of all genders, rich and poor, ~~states~~ ^{kings} and slaves etc. As such, the western conception of human rights cannot be compared to the rights conferred by the "Sole Divinity" and it is only the proper application of Islamic values which can eradicate discrimination and uphold dignity and respect of all. ~~of the atheistic west~~