

2018

day / date:

Q. Highlight the responsibilities of civil servants in the light of Islamic teachings.

A. Introduction

A civil servant is a government or public official who has the jurisdiction to deal with civil issues such as administration, police, customs etc. The concept of civil servants has been around for centuries and still exists today. As time has gone by the jobs and responsibilities of civil servants have ~~to~~ increased and become more complex. However, some key characteristics of civil servants are still applicable today. In light of the Islamic teachings from the time of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) to now, the major responsibilities are roughly the same. What is expected from a ^{good} Muslim civil servant is similar to what was expected back then. In this answer, the responsibilities of civil servants in light of Islamic teachings will be discussed.

Responsibilities of civil servants derived from the Prophet's era

Following the Prophet's footsteps in character

The responsibility of a civil servant is to follow the Prophet's example in letter and in spirit. The Prophet was the most exalted in character and the perfect specimen of mankind. Thus, this is written in the Quran:

من يطع الرسول فقد اطاع الله

And he who obeys the messenger of Allah, obeys Allah

(4:80)

Thus civil servants are supposed to follow the Prophet's teachings and obeying him is ultimately the obedience of Allah. In another verse the Quran says:

And verily, you (O Muhammad) are on an exalted standard of character &
(68:4)

Ergo, the civil servants should follow the Messenger of Allah and aspire to be like him because he had the best character.

Honesty and Trustworthiness

A civil servant is responsible for doing his work honestly and to gain the trust of the people. The civil servant should not indulge in dishonesty and commit sinful acts. He should not take more from the budget allocated to him or use public money for his own personal pleasures. The Prophet was called 'Al-Amin' and 'Al-Sadiq' which mean, the truthful and trustworthy, respectively. Thus, civil servants should be responsible to be honest and trustworthy.

Effective Tax collection but lenient when necessary

Civil servants such as tax collectors are supposed to collect zakat and jizya from the citizens. However, in the case the people are unable to pay or paying taxes is not feasible to them as it will drive them to suffer, leniency is supposed to be adopted. The Prophet advised his tax collectors to do their job diligently but to also be kind and not cause hardship.

This is still the responsibility of the civil servant.

Responsibilities of civil servants taught at the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs

During the reign of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, there was a practical application of Islam especially in administration. The responsibilities of the civil servants are primarily learnt from these practical applications and are applied to the world today.

The shunning of a luxurious lifestyle

During Umar's reign, the Caliph who was on a water park than civil servants could not live a luxurious lifestyle. This translated into the responsibilities of civil servants. For instance, they could not wear fine clothes, eat sifted flour, have tickle horses and could not even have a porter outside their doors.

This would limit civil servants from greed and ensure they lived a humble life. Moreover, they had to keep their doors open for the public to hear their complaints to improve their services of for the public.

Avoid aloofness from the public

A civil servant is supposed to be accessible to the public. Hazrat Ali, during his reign, wrote letters to his governors such as Malik Ashtar in which he highlighted twenty principles of good governance. One of those principles was to

not be stand-offish or arrogant or aloof from the public. It is thus the responsibility of a civil servant to be accessible to the public so he may improve his work. Moreover, Hazrat Ali also put this notion into practice as he would see, when he wrote a letter to Muawiyah to not keep his distance from the common public.

Treat the common man well, not the privileged few.

The responsibility of a civil servant is to treat the majority and the common people well. ~~One must~~ A civil servant must not only be inclined to a privileged group and favour them while the majority suffers or is left to its own devices. This was also highlighted in the principles of good governance in ^{Hazrat} Ali's letter to Malik Ashtar. From this, the responsibility of the civil servant is to do what is good for the majority, not just the minority.

Do not treat good and bad alike

A civil servant should identify what is good and what is bad. Good is what should be aspired to and bad should be avoided at all costs. To treat both equally would not incentivize good acts. For example, if someone commits theft he should be punished but if someone brings back a lost or stolen item, he should be rewarded. Thus, it is the responsibility of the civil servant to reward good acts. This was also a concept highlighted in Hazrat Ali's letter of good principles of governance.

Critical Analysis of civil servant responsibilities Today

Much of what was taught in the past is applicable today. Moreover, much of these responsibilities of civil servants hold today in the 21st century.

Remembering Allah and the Prophet

A civil servant is responsible to commit deeds that will please Allah. Allah put the Holy Prophet on earth to be followed and as a practical example of good character and morals. Thus, civil servants are supposed to do everything in their power to spread good and make their community better. Allah wants the Muslims in the Quran:

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ لَهَا رِزْقٌ مِمَّا كَسَبَتْ وَرَأَتْهَا

Every soul will be (held) / in pledge for its deeds

(74:38)

Thus, this reinforces the responsibility of acting as a true Khalifa sent by Allah and the notions of Hisbah (Accountability). Each person will be held accountable and civil servants must fulfil their responsibilities of serving the public diligently.

Humility: and no greediness a defining characteristic

Civil servants should not act as wastees of the public but rather as what their title suggests, servants. Their purpose is to spread peace and solve problems. They should treat everyone equally and also remember that they are equal in the eyes of Allah.

إنّ الله متّون إخوة
Indeed all Muslims are brothers

(49:10)

Shun greed and misappropriation

A civil servant should remain humble and dispense wealth and zakat where it is needed. He should not usurp wealth for his own personal benefits. Today, this is more applicable than ever. Civil servants are consistently accused of misappropriating funds meant for the public. Thus, it is his responsibility to avoid misappropriation and commit to good deeds and welfare.

Good reputation is the ultimate responsibility of the civil servant

In his letter, Hazrat Ali highlighted to Mark Ashtar that a civil servant or government official should have a good reputation as it reflects the public satisfaction. Hazrat Umar also highlighted this fact in one of his letters to his officials. Nowadays, civil servants have a notorious image. It shows that the people are generally unhappy with the services of civil servants. It is the civil servant's responsibility to do good work and this will eventually improve his reputation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a civil servant is responsible for promoting welfare and establishing a state according to Islamic principles. These responsibilities are adopted throughout Islamic

history, starting from the Prophet's era to the Caliph's era to today. The Quran and Ahadith and examples of the Rightly Guided Caliphs contain ample examples of how a civil servant should conduct himself and what his responsibilities are. Some of these responsibilities are highlighted above ~~for~~ previously including humility, working in the way of the Prophet, being equitable and spending money in a just way.