

The Role of Justice in Islamic Society

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Abstract: In Islamic doctrine justice (‘ADJ) occupies a prominent position as the pillar of social structure, moral governmental practice and personal behaviour. Established firmly in the Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Adl is not a legal but a moral, spiritual concept that rules all the spheres of the life. This paper reviews the notion of justice in Islam, its theological fundament, how it was applied in history during the Rashidun Caliphate, and the way it is applied in modern Muslim societies. Theoretical and practical aspects considered in the study help to underline the fact that the pursuit of justice represents the larger Islamic vision of human dignity, accountability, and societal harmony. The granted article also evaluates contemporary obstacles to justice in Muslim-majority territories and recommends the directions that can be taken to make governance and law consistent with Islamic principles.

Keywords: Islamic Justice, ‘Adl (Justice), Qur’anic Principles, Social Equity in Islam

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1. Introduction

The concept of justice in Islam is an essential element and can be found in the theological, moral, and legal systems. It is the foundation of a peaceful and just society where the rights of people are reserved and moral imperatives are achieved. Islamic notion of justice is thorough and covers not only the individual behaviour and social relations but also the state and legal decisions. The Quran and Sunnah echo with the emphasis on justice, and believers are ordered to be just even to the point where it is contrary to their own benefit or even kinship [1]. The universality of justice is emphasized by this divine injunction thus; justice becomes an obligatory condition on both sides; the rulers and the ruled in an Islamic society.

The concern of Islam towards justice is not only limited to the theory but also extended to the real life through the provisions of guidance towards just governance, economics and social welfare. Quran says, "Verily! Allah commands that justice, grace, and generosity to the close relatives" (16:90) [2]. The given verse emphasizes the importance of balancing justice and compassion so that the latter does not turn into the former, thus lacking mercy. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) applied this principle both in his personal and political life and created a just society in Medina where the rights of the Muslims and non-Muslims were protected under the Constitution of Medina [3]. His leadership revealed that justice does not merely

concern the legal decisions but also entails economic fairness, social justice, and ethical leadership.

The Islamic system of law (Sharia) aims at maintaining justice via its crime, trade, family, and human rights law. The maintenance of justice is one of the most important goals of Sharia (Maqasid al-Sharia), and it implies that people are not oppressed or favoured, and they get their right [4]. As an example, Islamic criminal law (Hudud) provides severe punishments (theft, adultery, etc.), which, however, can be executed only under the condition that the strict evidentiary requirements are fulfilled, thus eliminating the risk of wrongful conviction [5]. In the same manner, Islamic economic teachings forbid exploitation (riba) and hoarding and encourage fair trade and distribution of wealth via Zakat and Sadaqah [6]. These are just some of the measures that show the holistic nature of Islam when it comes to justice as it considers both individual morality and systemic fairness.

The Islamic definition of justice is very practical in the current world, and it can be used to solve the current issues in the world which includes corruption, inequality and violation of human rights. The academics claim that, the degradation of justice in most Muslim-majority societies nowadays is not attributable to any defect in Islamic doctrine but the inability to execute it appropriately [7]. The comparative researches conducted between Islamic and secular justice systems insinuate that Islamic focus on ethical responsibility and Godly supervision would be more efficient in deterring injustice [8]. Moreover, most of the Islamic principles of justice overlap with a range of universal values of human rights, yet they differ in their theological underpinnings and practices [9].

The paper will discuss the place of justice (Adl) in the Islamic society by examining its theological foundation, historical application and its application in modern society. It studies Quranic injunctions, Prophetic traditions, and classical Islamic jurisprudence in order to show how justice is incorporated in each and every facet of life. It also addresses the issues related to the application of Islamic justice in the contemporary settings and suggests the methods of reconciling the traditional principles and the modern demands. Through the insight of the Islamic concept of justice in its scope and breadth, societies may strive towards the future that is both fair and morally upstanding.

2. Literature Review

Justice ('Adl) in Islam is a central theme entrenched in both the Quran and Sunnah as a commandment of God and not as an ethical recommendation. The many Quranic verses that promote justice as a requirement include, indeed, Allah commands that justice shall be rendered (16:90) [10]. Traditional scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah believe that justice is an

essential quality of Allah Himself and, therefore, Muslims have to reflect it in every facet of existence [11]. Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) also discusses that the concept of justice is the core issue of Islamic spirituality because it makes the actions of human beings according to the will of God [12].

Contemporary thinkers like Tariq Ramadan (2009) emphasize that Islamic justice is not fixed but changes with the times and circumstances whilst being reference to Godly precepts [13]. Likewise, Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2008) explicates that Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) is framed on the conservation of justice, as observed in the Maqasid al-Sharia (Objectives of Islamic Law) [14]. These three theological debates construct justice as an unnegotiable Islamic principle, whether in individual behaviour and social interactions, as well as in government.

The models of Islamic governance in the past show how justice was institutionalized. The first Islamic social contract is commonly said to be the Constitution of Medina which was established by the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to provide justice to the Muslims, Jews, and other groups [15]. Early caliphs such as Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634-644) used the systems of public accountability (Hisbah) and welfare to curb oppression [16].

Even the contemporary scholars such as Khaled Abou El Fadl (2004) suggest that the absence of justice in the contemporary Muslim-majority states is a result of the rejection of Islamic principles of governance rather than the deficiency in the doctrine [17]. By way of contrast, Wael Hallaq (2009) is critical of the modern model of the nation-state, indicating that Islamic justice demands decentralized and communal governance [18]. These views indicate the contradiction between the customary Islamic legal systems of justice and the modern political organizations.

The concept of Islamic economics is based on the notions of fairness forbidding exploitation (riba) and encouraging redistribution of wealth (Zakat). According to Chapra (2000), Islamic finance prevents the inequities of capitalism because it requires ethical trade and forbids hoarding [19]. Economic justice is emphasized in the Quran, which specifically prohibits the unjust consumption of one another wealth (4:29) [20].

Siddiqi (2004) focuses on analyzing Zakat as an instrument of social justice that aims at redistributing wealth to the poor and diminishing class differences [21]. In the meantime, the modern economists such as Monzer Kahf (2013) discuss the Islamic models of microfinance as the present-day implementations of the economic justice [22]. These literatures explain

why the Islamic concepts of economics can solve systemic inequality, as well as enhance sustainable development.

Gender equity is considered to be one of the most disputed features of the Islamic justice. Such classical scholars as Al-Shafi'i (d. 820) understood Quranic instructions about inheritance and testimony as the indication of distinct yet equal gender roles [23]. The contemporary scholars like Amina Wadud (1999) criticize the traditional interpretations and insist on re-interpretation of Islamic sources in the quest of gender justice [24].

Leila Ahmed (1992) follows the history of changes in women rights in Islamic law and points out that the early Muslim society gave women their rights to property and divorce which other civilizations did not offer [25]. Nevertheless, Kecia Ali (2006) is a critic of patriarchal understanding of Fiqh, and she believes that there should be reforms in marriage and divorce laws [26]. Such controversies show how the discussion of gender justice has changed in Islamic legal traditions.

Penal codes of the Islamic criminal law (Hudud, Qisas, Ta zir) are frequently examined. Classical jurists, such as Ibn Qayyim (d. 1350) held that Hudud punishments were to serve as a deterrent to crime but with high standards of evidence required to ensure that the wrong person was not convicted [27]. Contemporary thinkers such as Abdullahi An-Na'im (1990) advocate reconciliation of the Islamic criminal justice system with international best practices on human rights [28].

Bassam Tibi (2002) compared Islamic justice to the secular systems of law and order and although he acknowledges that the Islamic system of law and order has failed, he writes that the divine responsibility enshrined in the Sharia has a greater capacity to deter corruption [29]. Critics such as Ann Elizabeth Mayer (1999) however point out contradictions between Hudud punishments and contemporary human rights practices [30]. This furor of debate indicates the difficulty of practicing the traditional Islamic justice within the modern legal law.

A number of researchers have compared western legal philosophies with Islamic justice. The Theory of Justice (1971) by John Rawls has been compared to Islamic ideas of equity, and it has been argued that Islam has a divine basis which makes it objective in its view of morality [31]. Sherman Jackson (2002) discusses the compatibility of the Islamic natural law (Fitrah) and the universal principles of justice [32].

At the same time, Mohammad Fadel (2008) investigates areas of convergence between Islamic and liberal democratic justice, specifically with regard to constitutional government

[33]. These comparative analyses indicate that, although these are differences, Islamic justice has common objectives with the international human rights advocacies.

Islamic justice is all-encompassing, but contemporary societies present a challenge to the system of justice. Olivier Roy (2004) writes that the politicized version of Sharia has given way to authoritarianism in certain states with Muslim majorities [34]. Taha Jabir Alalwani (2011) on the other hand demands Ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) to implement Islamic justice in the new circumstances [35].

As illustrated in the empirical research of Jonathan Brown (2017), Muslim communities tend to accept justice reforms, yet they will firmly reject the Western-imposed changes in laws [36]. This indicates a demand for authentic, Islamic-based justice systems that address modern issues like corruption and inequality.

3. Analysis

This table presents 10 significant verses from the Qur’an that explicitly command or reflect justice (‘Adl). Each entry includes the Surah name, verse number, partial Arabic text, English translation, and the core message conveyed. These verses show that justice in Islam is a divine mandate—not optional—applicable in personal dealings, governance, and even with non-Muslims. The consistent message across these verses is that Allah loves those who act justly, and that justice is central to a balanced and ethical society.

Table 1: Qur’anic Verses Emphasizing Justice

No.	Surah Name	Verse Number	Arabic Text (Partial)	English Translation (Partial)	Key Message
1	Al-Nahl	90	بِالْعَدْلِ يَأْمُرُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ	Indeed, Allah commands justice...	Justice as divine command
2	Al-Ma'idah	8	لِلَّهِ قَوَائِمٌ كُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ	Be persistently standing firm in justice...	Be just even against self
3	An-Nisa	58	أَنْ يَأْمُرَكُمْ اللَّهُ أَنْ تُوَدُّوا	Allah commands you to render trusts...	Justice in leadership
4	Al-A'raf	29	بِالْقِسْطِ رَبِّي أَمَرَ قُلْ	Say, "My Lord has commanded justice..."	Fair dealings
5	Al-Hujurat	13	اللَّهُ عِنْدَ أَكْرَمَكُمْ إِنَّ	The most noble of you is the most righteous...	Equality & fairness
6	Al-Mumtahanah	8	الَّذِينَ عَنِ اللَّهِ يَنْهَأَكُمْ لَا	Allah does not forbid you from being just...	Justice with non-Muslims
7	Ash-Shura	15	بَيْنَكُمْ لِأَعْدِلَ أَمْرٌ	I have been commanded to do justice between you	Prophet's mission
8	Al-Hadid	25	بِالْقِسْطِ النَّاسُ لِيَقُومَ	So that mankind may maintain justice...	Purpose of revelation

9	Al-An'am	152	أَقُولُوا وَبِالْعَدْلِ	Speak with justice...	Justice in speech
10	Al-Isra	35	كَلِّمُوا إِذَا كَلَّمْتُمْ إِذَا كَلَّمْتُمْ إِذَا كَلَّمْتُمْ إِذَا كَلَّمْتُمْ	Give full measure when you measure	Economic justice

This table highlights how justice was practiced by key Islamic figures and rulers, such as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the rightly guided Caliphs, and reformist leaders like Umar ibn Abdul Aziz. Each entry outlines a specific act of justice, its impact on society, and its historical source. These examples emphasize Islam’s practical commitment to justice across legal, social, economic, and political dimensions. They demonstrate that justice was not just preached but actively implemented—even when it meant ruling against one’s own family or position.

Table 2: Historical Examples of Justice in Islamic Governance

No.	Caliph/Ruler	Period (CE)	Key Justice Act	Impact on Society	Source Reference
1	Caliph Umar ibn Khattab	634–644	Equal treatment in court case vs. son	Rule of law for all	Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 4
2	Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)	610–632	Returned items to non-Muslims fairly	Trust and interfaith respect	Ibn Hisham's Seerah
3	Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib	656–661	Court ruling against himself	Justice over personal gain	Nahj al-Balagha
4	Caliph Abu Bakr	632–634	Redistribution of zakat	Social equity	Al-Tabari, Tarikh
5	Umar ibn Abdul Aziz	717–720	Dismissed unjust governors	Reform in public administration	Ibn Kathir
6	Caliph Uthman ibn Affan	644–656	Compilation of Qur'an for unity	Standardization and clarity	Sahih Bukhari
7	Saladin (Salahuddin)	1137–1193	Forgiveness to captured enemies	Justice in war	Ibn Shaddad
8	Imam Abu Hanifa	699–767	Rejected judge position to stay fair	Integrity in law	Tadhkirat al-Huffaz
9	Caliph Harun al-Rashid	786–809	Built justice offices	Access to law	Al-Masudi's Muruj al-Dhahab
10	Caliph Al-Ma'mun	813–833	Established Bayt al-Hikma	Justice through knowledge	Al-Yaqubi

This table presents real-world justice reforms and efforts in ten contemporary Muslim-majority countries. It lists key initiatives (like Shariah courts, anti-corruption drives, labor reforms), the year they began, their positive outcomes, and ongoing issues. The table shows that while many Muslim countries have made strides toward justice, they continue to face obstacles such as political interference, gender inequality, or enforcement gaps. It serves to connect Islamic principles of justice with present-day governance and highlights areas where Islamic values can further guide modern reforms.

Table 3: Modern Applications and Challenges to Justice in Muslim Societies

No.	Country	Justice Reform Effort	Year Started	Achievements	Ongoing Challenges
1	Pakistan	Shariah courts establishment	1980	Faster rulings in civil cases	Political interference
2	Saudi Arabia	Vision 2030 legal reforms	2016	Digitalization of courts	Gender equality debates
3	Malaysia	Syariah court modernization	2001	Family law clarity	Jurisdictional conflicts
4	Indonesia	Anti-corruption campaigns	2002	Successful prosecutions	Elite impunity
5	Egypt	Judicial independence movement	2011	Increased awareness	State surveillance
6	Turkey	Constitutional court reforms	2010	Transparency in legal process	Political purges post-2016
7	Iran	Qisas and Hudood revisions	1990s	Moral justice emphasis	International human rights issues
8	Nigeria	Sharia law in northern states	1999	Community-based dispute resolution	Human rights concerns
9	UAE	Labor and wage reforms	2020	Migrant rights improvement	Enforcement inconsistency
10	Qatar	Worker rights under scrutiny	2017	Legal aid for expats	Wage gaps and delays

4. Conclusion

Justice ('Adl) is not only a legal or political concept in Islam, but a divine principle that permeates every aspect of individual, societal, and institutional life. Rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, the emphasis on justice reflects the broader Islamic vision of fairness, accountability, and moral integrity. From the actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the rightly guided Caliphs to modern-day reform efforts in Muslim societies, justice remains a fundamental pillar of Islamic civilization. Despite contemporary challenges, a renewed commitment to Islamic justice can lead to more inclusive, equitable, and ethically guided governance. Upholding 'Adl is both a spiritual obligation and a social necessity for ensuring peace, dignity, and trust within the Ummah and beyond

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