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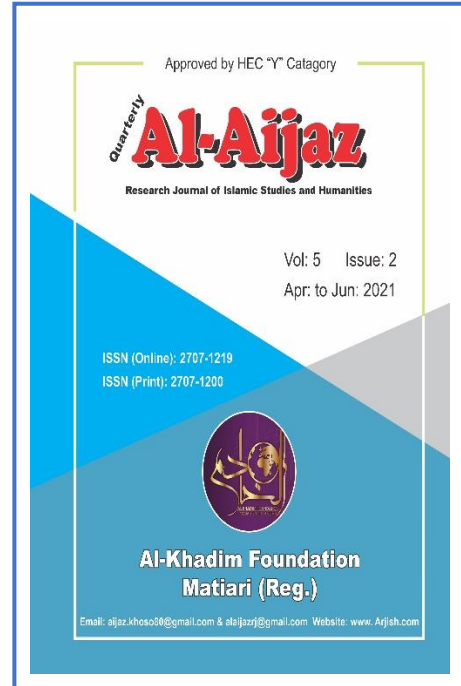
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TOPIC:

The Portrayal of Human Rights in Islam –Multi-Perspective Disposition

AUTHORS:

1. Dr. Sumbul Ansar, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Allied Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi. Email: sansar@smiu.edu.pk
2. Dr. Syeda Rakhshanda Kaukab, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Education Szabist University, Karachi. Email: srkaukab@gmail.com
3. Dr. Umair Rais uddin, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Allied Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi. Email: umair.rais@smiu.edu.pk

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The Portrayal of Human Rights in Islam –Multi-Perspective Disposition

Dr. Sumbul Ansar*

Dr. Syeda Rakhshanda Kaukab**

Dr. Umair Rais uddin***

Abstract

This paper briefly sketches the nature, practices, and challenges of human rights from Muslim viewpoints. Historically, Islam is the pioneer of endorsing human rights. However, there are clashes between the Islamic and western concept of human rights, which has categorized human rights into various schools of thoughts. This debate has ignored realism and obscured the real essence of human values. The paper briefly analyzes the potential of human rights principles and their scope to serve as a mediator to improve human rights conditions. Although Muslim countries are facing severe human rights challenges due to social, cultural, political and economic forces, the concept of human values and justice, as portrayed by Islam is universal and has positive genesis to improve the global state of human rights upon embracement.

Keywords: Portrayal, Human Rights, Islam, Realism, Universal, Human Nature, Justice

Introduction

Globalization has enhanced the livelihood of people; strengthened socio-economic ties; brought technology revolution; supported intellectual openness; harmonized international relations, so on and so forth. Many societal developments are the end products of global interactions; but it has equally provoked challenges, which are currently faced by the global community (Griswold, 2012). We cannot undervalue this fact that right through history, the human is the victim of suffering; but their intellectual capacities can disperse barriers of challenges.

Human rights are the fundamental rights of every individual. It has become the voice of global morality (Hopgood, 2015), which helps in articulating multifaceted issues (Phillips & Gritzner, 2009) and ensures global connectivity.

As the interdependencies are expanding, the world is pounding with more pressing issues like economic crisis, the catastrophe of water and sanitation, environmental issues, violation, massacre, child labor, women abuse, terrorism, etc. All these challenges come under the umbrella of human rights violations (Cruft, Liao & Renzo, 2015). The cyclic effect of globalization and the World Wars are often blamed for emerging human rights abuses (Kanmony, 2010); however, it emerged when human beings were treated with faultily and the countries failed to address global challenges.

* Assistant Professor, Dept. of Allied Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi.

Email: sansar@smiu.edu.pk

** Assistant Professor, Dept. of Education Szabist University, Karachi.

Email: srkaukab@gmail.com

*** Assistant Professor, Dept. of Allied Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi.

Email: umair.rais@smiu.edu.pk

Half a decade ago, people were not desirous to highlight human rights issues; however, today, due to the emergence of laws & treaties, powerful media and civil society, human rights movements have accelerated and brought revolutionary changes in some parts of the world, by providing justice to socially and morally neglected people (Langley, 2013; Rajawat, 2001); but the situation is not balanced in each part of the world. The world is still witnessing severe human rights abuses (Ahmed, 2006). These abuses are not doubling rather presenting quadruplet views. There are few countries, whose laws still isolate and deprive people of their basic rights. According to the World Report (Human Rights Watch, 2015), Middle Eastern countries face severe criticism from the global community over human rights abuses, particularly in the area of women's rights and freedom of expression. According to the Report of Human Rights Risk Atlas, Middle East, and North Africa have witnessed the severe deterioration of human rights (Gates, 2013).

There is a war of culture and battle against intolerance surging globally. In a few western countries, wearing a veil is banned, while in a few Muslim countries, women are not allowed to raise their voices. Similarly, early marriage is legal in few countries, while in other, age of maturity is defined for marriage. Some countries prefer giving importance to the well-being of individuals, while there are few, who maltreat humans. Situations are many, but the fundamental set of questions is, despite passing several documents, policies and global conventions; despite astounding penetration of human rights, regardless of witnessing social, political and economic developments, why human rights are still violated? Why the needs of human beings are left unattended? Why human values are demoralized?

In today's world of self-centeredness, people are saturated and have forgotten social and moral values. Due to experiencing cyclic abuses, they are numb to react consciously and are the victim of deprivation. They disobey human rights constantly, which create nonpeaceful ambiance around the world. In addition, the mechanism of human rights presented by each country does not ensure its equal access and practical implementation (Weston & Grear, 2016). In all such circumstances, the need for the availability of a proper structure of human rights was always felt.

Human Rights in Islam

Islam has given the fundamental spot to humanity. It symbolizes peace and always disseminates the same to the global community. In the Islamic view, Allah has established the mechanism of rights for all human beings.

The historical emergence of human rights is believed to have begun from the spread of Islam. The philosophy of human rights in Islam is based on social justice, human dignity, and equality (Singh, 1998). The Holy Quran has always been an illuminating source of direction for the Muslim community. Our Holy Prophet (SAW) guided people towards Islamic civilization through his words, acts and deeds of kindness. All in all, Islam has always valued human dignity and supported the notion of equal rights.

The crux of the philosophical theory, presented by Abdullah An-Na'im's is based on the practices of Islamic principles, which develops attributes of humanity and serves as a

source of unity for Muslims (Baderin, 2010). The teaching of Islam confirms that every human has spirituality (Musofer, 2013). Humanism and spirituality are the most important attributes of ethical individuals, which must be identified through inner search and by exploring self values.

Looking back into Islamic history, discrimination, gender biases, cultural conflicts, and all sort of human abuses existed due to ignorance. Our Holy Prophet (SAW) established Islamic society on the principles of justice and equality. He was the patron of humanity and a blessed model for mankind. All the teachings shared by the Holy Prophet (SAW) are defined with regard to the sacred book, the Holy Quran. He was the personification of compassionate, who borne several hardships, yet preached the message of humanity (Ahmad, 2006). On several occasions, he practiced human rights and let the followers apply the same. From the rights of women to the values of peace, each aspect serves as guiding principles for Muslims.

On the 10th year of Hijrah, during the last sermon, the Holy Prophet (SAW) depicted principles on human rights. His Last Sermon is considered as the most authentic and the fundamental basis for human rights. This First Charter of Human Rights guarantees full protection and safeguard to human beings. He presented the consolidated value system and discussed human values. Since then, the Islamic principles flourished and bloomed across the Arab. Many treaties were passed to observe the practical implementation of human rights. It was because of the intellectual endeavors of our beloved Prophet (SAW) that the condition of human rights improved, and social, and economic development was witnessed.

Quran directed human beings to protect human rights to their best (Parekh, 2010). The basic human rights in Islam include but not limited to the right to life, freedom, justice, and equality. The global ethical principles as defined by Islam include equity, protection of life, freedom, and tolerance, value of intellect, preservation of honor and sanctity of ownership (Ahmed, 2006). It is assumed by the West that Islam has no well- defined laws and principles regarding human rights (Shadid & Koningsveld, 2002); however, this perception is not valid. The principles of human rights in Islam begun with humanity.

Quran says

“Whosoever kills a human being without (any reason like) man slaughter, or corruption on earth, it is as though he had killed all mankind ...” (5:32)

Islam respects human life and supports the rights of all human beings regardless of gender, age religion, etc (Ramadan, 2006). Islam always respects humanity and human values.

Justice is the essence of Islamic values. Good deeds and equal rights are always appreciated by Islam. Allah says

“God commands justice, doing good, and generosity towards relatives and He forbids what is shameful, blameworthy, and oppressive. He teaches you, so that you may take heed.” (16:90)

On another occasion, Allah says

“You who believe stand steadfast before God as witness for (truth and) fair play.” (4: 135)

It clarifies that Islam guides Muslims to treat everyone uniformly. Islam has always promoted the concept of pluralism and diversity and invites the followers to promote equal justice for all. Since injustice has escalated in today’s world, if the principles of human rights as defined by Islam are applied to all the countries, human sufferings can be reduced.

The concept of women and children protection is championed by Islam. They are considered as the souls of Islamic society. Women, in particular, have been granted individuals as well as collective rights. Before the teachings of Holy Prophet (SAW) women were discriminated against on the basis of culture and caste, while children were not treated equally; however Holy Prophet (SAW) developed sense of equality and also granted respect and protection to them. Quran says

"And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women." (2:228)

"Kill not your children for fear of want. We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is great sin." (17: 31)

Allah granted equal rights to both men and women and each one is accountable to Allah for their deeds. Serious punishments have been prescribed in Islam for those, who treat women and children brutally. Unfortunately, children and women are not being given equal status in today’s world. Sexual harassment, child labor, child abuse, and many other forms of abuse are associated with minorities (Human Rights Watch, 2015; Ensalaco & Majka, 2005; Kramarae & Spender, 2004). It raises a question over the effectualness of the current global laws and conventions, which has somehow failed to cater to the needs of minorities. The rights of women and children as defined by Islam are believed to have the power to improve human rights conditions in the world due to balance law and justified code of conduct.

Discrimination is highly disregarded in Islam. Islam not only recognizes absolute equality between men and women but also considers it as an important principle of democracy. Standing equally for prayer is the best portrayal of equality, where there is no distinction among human beings. Quran says

“And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors; most surely there are signs in this for the learned.” (30:22)

It clearly shows that Islam is the greatest proponent of human rights.

The movement towards Islamic rights was initiated to complement global conventions on human rights. Several laws were drafted by the Muslim countries including The Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights, 1981 and the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights, 1990. The laws presented by the Islamic countries faced criticism due to cultural and religious boundaries. Moreover, the philosophy of human rights currently practiced by Muslim countries failed to grip many global challenges and weakened human rights

practices due to western influence.

East or West- Where does Human Rights fall?

The principles and the standards of human rights were codified to ensure its practical implementation on the universal ground (Donnelly, 2007); however, its collision with cultural relativism has raised several questions over its universality (McClennen, & Moore, 2016). Like, some countries hold this viewpoint that the global human rights laws were framed by the dominating elites without considering the ideological frameworks of the developing countries.

The scope of civil rights before the seventeenth century was limited. Though several ideas were presented by the scholars and philosophers, it was practically demonstrated after the eighteenth century. The western world vociferously declared a concrete model of human rights after the establishment of the United Nations (Khamenei, 1989). The UDHR (UN General Assembly, 1948) was the first formal document, promoted on global human rights principles; however, that also raised debate between Islam and West over the principles of Human Rights (Abu-Sahlieh, 1990). From the viewpoint of the researcher, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was drafted by the developed nation, not in consultant with the sufferers of human rights. Moreover, the drafted declaration has limited scope, as there is no room for the inclusion of further articles, highlighting rights related to current pressing issues.

The portrayal of human rights in Islam by the East and West has several contradictions. The applicability and universality of human rights greatly ignored the real essence of humanity. The image of Islam, as portrayed by the west has shaped unconstructive ideas about Muslims. The collective principles by the west are highly disregarded by the Muslims (Ahmed, 1994), which was one of the reasons for the establishment of Islamic human rights. Similarly, the west views Islamic human rights as a traditional, pragmatist, secular and based on Shariah law, which, according to them, lack critical engagement with human rights discourses (Bielefeldt, 2000).

Khameni (1989) critically analyzed the views of the West towards Islamic human rights. He shared that Human rights were not given attention by the west due to which, the fundamental rights of people were greatly ignored. He argued that the elite people of the west drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where ordinary people's voices were never taken into consideration. Even though the west passed convention, yet serious crimes are still taking place due to lack efficacy and applicability of the defined principles. The system of dominance shattered human principles and raised issues of human rights abuses across the globe. The Muslim leaders formulated human rights law within the boundary of Shariah, as to give structural guidelines to Muslim Ummah. The main highlights of Islamic human rights are humanity, ethics, and human values. The brief content analysis of three historical documents is presented below:

Table 1: Showing the Main Content of Historical Documents

Main Content		
Last Sermon of The Holy Prophet	Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1981	Islamic Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
Belief in Allah	Right to Life	Right to Life
Non- Discrimination	Right to Freedom	No to Discrimination
Concept of Equality	Right to Equality	Freedom of Liberty
Concept of Justice	Right to Justice	Right to Security
Brotherhood	Protection against Slavery	No to Slavery
Freedom of Speech	Right to Education	No to cruel Treatment
Women Right	Right to Privacy	Accountable to Law
Children Right	Freedom of Movement	Fundamental Rights
No to Killing	Protection of Honor	Right to Privacy
Right to Blood Relation	Protection against Abuse	Right to Freedom of Movement
Accountable for Words and Deeds	Rights of Minorities	Right to Education
Right to Basic Standard of Living	Right to Protection	Freedom of Religion
Right to Inheritance	Right to Free Trial	Right to social security
Laws on the Basis of Shariah	Right of Family	Right to freedom of peaceful assembly
Emphasis on Religious Duties and Teachings of Quran	Freedom of Belief	Right to participate in Government
Rights of Slaves		

Comparing the documents elucidate that Human rights principles, as defined by three documents support the principles of human values and human dignity. However, the last sermon greatly emphasis moral values, social justice, religious duties and the teachings of the Quran. The Universal Declaration is though expressive (Morsink, 2011) yet politically dominated, while the Islamic document is purely based on social values. One cannot refuse this fact that globalization has changed the mindset of people and human rights violations do exist in Muslim countries as well; however, if follow Islamic principles, all the challenges can be resolved. Although strict laws have been defined for the violators of human rights and boundaries are set for few areas, yet, the defined principles are of great importance and the moral component, in particular, can serve as a guiding principle for the global community.

Conclusion

The world currently presents the miserable condition of human rights violations. The great responsibility is on the shoulders of the Muslim community to come forward and play their role in improving the human condition. One of the best possible ways is to impose an

Islamic value system (Khamenei, 1989). Although, the UDHR and many other human rights documents, passed by the West are of great importance, but still, the guiding principles as per shared by the Holy Quran and our Holy Prophet (SAW) has supremacy, which can bring peace and prosperity to the global community, groom individuals morally and ethically, which no any other document can convey comprehensively.

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