

Human Rights in Islamic Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Development and Human rights are interconnected and are safeguarded by the Charter of United Nations. So far as the Islamic concept of human rights is concerned Khutba Hajjatul Wada has paramount importance in the history of human rights and sustainable human development and progress. The end of the cold war brings multiple global problems and challenges to international relations and gives birth to new perception regarding human rights in the comity of nations. Religion addresses the matters of human good and especially Islam is the religion of peace and tranquility, which focuses on the success of human beings. In this research work, the researcher has conducted thematic analysis from the existing literature and construed his work with the help of a comprehensive study of all three monotheists religions and their concept of sustainable human development.



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Introduction

From the Islamic point of view sustainable development is a multi-dimensional process which diverts the attention of human beings towards balance among social, economic and political rights on one hand and safe environmental scenario on the other. Besides, it is obligatory to use the available resources in such a manner that they should be safeguarded so that society can give better tomorrow to the next generation.¹


As per Quranic Verses, human beings are the representatives of Almighty Allah on the surface of Earth and all resources are created for them and for their rightful use irrespective of creed, color, caste and social status. Now it is their lawful and religious duty to use these resources for the sustainable development of human beings and humanity.²

Development is described in Holy Quran as "Architecture and Construction", Almighty Allah says:

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"It is He Who hath produced you from the earth and settled you therein" (Surah Hud, verse 61) in this Quranic verse it is indicated that building of land is the necessity of human beings for development. While Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "if the Final Day comes upon you while you were planting a seed, then continue on planting it."³

The notion of Human Rights is as old as humanity itself. It is come to the surface with the birth of the second human on planet earth. With their slow and gradual development the idea of human rights developed in raw and abstract form, which paved the way for further needs and classification, because it was almost impossible to develop human evolution without certain rights.⁴ With the inception of Divine and major world religions, the concept of human rights emerged in a refined and constructive form.⁵

The most significant development in the present era is the codification of International Law, the constitutions of independent nations, the charter of UN and declaration of human rights. It is worth mentioning to state that in this age of information society the concept of human rights and sustainable development are juxtaposed to one another, that their separation is not possible.⁶

In Islam, it is believed that all rights and duties are granted by Almighty Allah, while its direct source is a revelation (Wahi). It is evident from the Quranic verses and Prophetic sayings that all human beings are bestowed with plenty of rights and freedom for the fulfillment of their obligations and also for their sustainable development in the Universe.⁷ In this context, the first and foremost practical effort was the Last Sermon (10 AH/632AD) of Holy Prophet (SAW) in Arafaat, some fourteen hundred years ago. The Magna Carta is also one of the little segments or the brainchild of this remarkable Sermon of the Holy Prophet of Islam.⁸

The aim of this study is to give paramount arguments in favor of a relationship between sustainable development and human rights with reference to Islam and its effects on global civil society.

Human Rights in Judaism and Christianity

There is a great discussion in monotheistic religion that Judaism is concerned only with human obligation

and not with human rights. In addition to this, there is also a perception that Judaism is an inadequate ethical system and has lack of human sympathetic corner. According to Jewish jurisprudence, the right to life is the most precious right of human being and to destroy someone is tantamount to destroy the whole world and vice versa.⁹ The notion regarding the unity of mankind is the natural outcome of the omnipotent God, as it promotes the strongest idea that the whole humanity has the one, God. Hebrew also believes in monotheism that teaches about the brotherhood of mankind. The modern concept of human rights cannot be found anywhere either in the Hebrew Bible or in the rabbinic literature of Judaism.¹⁰

In this backdrop, humans have a unique place in Judaism. But there is a tension in texts, as the core point is their interest which is pre-eminent. It keeps in mind the ethical implications, while humans are really independent, free and have a reason. It leads human beings towards the creation of sound environment and to take part in the efforts for their better tomorrow.¹¹

According to Biblical teachings, man is created in the Divine image and therefore has the rights to life, dignity, and freedom. Declaration on Judaism and human rights, adopted in Montreal in April 1974, human rights are an integral part of the faith and tradition of Judaism. All humans belong to one family and every person will be dealt with justice. These will be the basic sources of Jewish commitment to human rights. This declaration also stands for the advancement and protection of basic human rights and freedom for all community members.¹²

Those who believe that all human beings are created by the likeness of God are under obligation to respect all humanity what-so-ever they have feelings about them. Jewish law gives utmost importance to human dignity. But to give obedience and respect to God is most important in Judaism than Jewish laws. The Midrash (Midrash Genesis Rabbah, 90:2; Midrash Leviticus Rabbah 24:9) states that "our God is great and we are also holier than you".¹³

So far as Christianity is concerned man is created in the image of God and has a certain dignity and dominance over the rest of the creation. Therefore,

the murder of a man is a very heinous crime. The Ten Commandments also prohibit the murder, adultery, theft, coveting and false testimony. These five laws relate to the ethical standards of human beings. Beside this, to treat immigrants with affection, to look after poor, to grant loans (interest-free) and to release certain servants after every fifty years are the famous human rights to be guaranteed under the religious safeguard of Christianity.¹⁴

Bible is considered to be a common heritage of the Church, as well as the people of Europe also because it is the oldest spiritual treasure of mankind. It contains the holy words of God, the creation of the universe and also of human beings. It is obvious from its Scripture that God is always caring for his creatures, due to special relations, salvation and return to God. From this point of view, two important principles of human rights can be deduced, one is the freedom to choose and other is the freedom from harm. It is pertinent to state that justice, to help poor, equality, right to life, and the right to religion is sprung from this point of view, while civil rights are derived from the later.¹⁵

Historically in the Roman era, human rights such as the right to food, clothing, shelter, education, information, reputation, employment, and religious freedom were emphasized by the Christian norms. Gender equality is also one of the greatest stances of the feminist of that very era that emphasized the equality of man and woman.¹⁶

The teaching of Christianity guides to love God and also to glorify and obey His commandments. To look after and care someone is really to glorify God. In Christianity, it is persuaded that duty is more precious than rights and priority should be given to one's duties, not rights. As God is the creator of the universe, therefore, He is the source of rights of all human beings. It is the duty of the ruler to fulfill the requirements of the rights of human beings as they are guaranteed by God and ruler is responsible for it. On the planet earth, political and social institutions are the agents of God and therefore responsible for justice and peace, as they are the core essence of human rights in prevailing circumstances.¹⁷

The above views regarding human rights reveal the diversity of approaches and theologies. These

approaches help to identify the image of God, community, creation, and sin. That is why the findings also lead towards further understanding and support of human rights in present circumstances and also in day to day affairs of Judaism and Christianity.¹⁸

McGill International Colloquium on Judaism and Human Rights (1974) states that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Interdependence of Human Rights, the war against poverty, progress in human rights law, the integrity of human rights law, elimination of racial, ethnic and religious discrimination, the struggle against anti-Semitism and the preservation of cultures are the cornerstones of the declaration of Judaism and Human Rights.¹⁹

Human rights were considered to be the prerequisite for sustainable development even in the pre-historical period, while its reflections could be observed in Judaism and Christianity also. But with the passage of time, and deviation from the true spirit of the injunctions of the then Messenger of God and also the teaching of the divine books of that very time, Almighty Allah for the sake of the success of humanity sent Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to guide them to the right destination. The concept of human rights that was mirrored in all divine religions is reaffirmed in Islam with great force and binding spirit for the betterment of humanity.²⁰

The necessity to introduce the last Prophet and to give him special Ummah that is prestigious in all respect from all previous Ummahs and the real aim of this is to benefit human beings and guide them to fulfill the "Haqooq-ul-Ebad" means human rights. Prof. Philip K Hitti who has the insight on Arab History is of the view that "Courage, endurance, in time of trouble, observance of the rights and obligations of neighborliness, manliness, generosity and hospitality, regard for women and fulfillment of solemn promises" are some of the rights Islam likes the Muslims to observe in letter and spirit.²¹

Islam and Human Rights

Pre-Islamic Period

Before Islam, there was Dark Age in Arab. Might was right. There was no law and war was the order of the day. In these circumstances to think about the concept of human rights was just like a willow the wisp. Wars broke out on tiny affairs like to drink water

before the opponent and horse race with the rival and many other little affairs. Women position was as downgraded as infant babies and little girls were buried alive. This was an alarming situation because in the surroundings Judaism and Christianity were practiced, the circumstances were deteriorated day by day even the neighboring countries were not willing to rule these barbarian people.²²

Plundering, theft, killing and dishonoring were the common crimes of those days and people were not bothering about these violations and considered them the act of bravery and pride. They narrated the stories of cruelties of their forefather with great pomp and show in public gatherings and especially in the festival of Ukaz.²³

In this situation, Almighty Allah sent His last Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to guide humanity and to teach them their real cause of creation, objectives and rights and duties. It was very difficult in that situation to guide them to the right path because all were indulged deeply in malpractices and a clear violation of human respect, dignity, honor and also brushed aside the teachings of previous messenger and Devine Books of God.²⁴

Ba'at Uqba Sani, A Landmark for Sustainable Development of Women Rights

In the early period of Islam, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) met with the delegation of surrounding Arabs in the darkness of night and delivered them the invitation to embrace Islam. It is pertinent to state that in this delegation both the genders were present and it was the first time in Arab history that women were not segregated on the basis of gender. All the participants, men, and women were treated equally and there was no discrimination. This act of equality worked as a flash flood and paved the way to spread Islam in the surroundings because now they considered that this new religion could treat them with honor, equality, and dignity.²⁵

Gazwa'at, The Precedent for Modern Laws of War, and Prisoner of War

Gazwa-e Badr was the first proper war between right and wrong (*Haq o Batef*) which was fought between Muslims and non-Muslims in 2 AH. The

Muslims won the war and a number of non-Muslims were arrested as prisoners of war. After consultation, it was decided that a very humble treatment would be extended to them. One of the most important clauses was that to release prisoner of war on the condition to educate children of Muslims by those prisoners of war who were educated in their respective fields. Education is the foremost human right of every child that was honored by the newly born religion in the crucial time of war, which was infact the prerequisite for sustainable development of any nation, religion, and country.²⁶

It will be worth mentioning to state that in all the forthcoming Gazwat (holy wars in which the Prophet (SAW) himself participated) the instructions and practice of the companions of the Prophet became precedent for the modern day experts of war tactics. During the war, Muslims observed and abided by the injunctions of Holy Prophet regarding war time, which were as under: -

- “Do not kill any child, any woman, or any elder or sick person.” (Sunan Abu Dawud)
- “Do not practice treachery or mutilation. (Al-Muwatta)
- Do not uproot or burn palms or cut down fruitful trees.(Al-Muwatta)
- Do not slaughter a sheep or a cow or a camel, except for food.” (Al-Muwatta)
- “If one fights his brother, [he must] avoid striking the face, for Allah created Adam in the image of Himself.” (Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim)
- “Do not kill the monks in monasteries, and do not kill those sitting in places of worship. (Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal)
- “Do not destroy the villages and towns, do not spoil the cultivated fields and gardens, and do not slaughter the cattle.” (Sahih Bukhari; Sunan Abu Dawud)
- “Do not wish for an encounter with the enemy; pray to God to grant you security; but when you [are forced to] encounter them, exercise patience.” (Sahih Muslim)
- “No one may punish with fire except the Lord of Fire.” (Sunan Abu Dawud).
- “Accustom yourselves to do good if people do good, and to not do wrong even if they commit evil.” (Al-Tirmidhi)

All the above said, injunctions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) can be mirrored in the Hague Conferences 1899 and 1907 and are working as a precedent in the codification of International law, international treaties and international conventions. It is crystal clear that Islamic norms are so impressive, powerful, logical and according to the need of the hour that even today their role is prominent in the sustainable development of human rights across the board from east to west and north to south.

Farewell Sermon of the Holy Prophet (SAW)

The last sermon of the Holy Prophet (SAW) has the pedestal of international manifesto regarding human rights which is really a basic criterion for sustainable human development in all ages. It is followed by all humanity irrespective of creed, race, color, nationality, and religion. It is also considered a perpetual human rights charter for all generations and has the quality of futuristic vision and approach. Following are salient features of the last sermon²⁷

Equality

“O’mankind, we have created you from a man and woman and divided you into groups and tribes, so as to distinguish you from one another. No Arab is superior to non-Arab and no white is better than black. The only superiority criterion is piety”.

This is the fundamental principle for sustainable development otherwise there will be a war of superiority complex between the haves and have-nots, which will erode the very nature of development and will destroy all efforts and will lead to destruction.

No Claims to Superiority

“Human beings are superior from angels. But all are off-springs of Hazrat Adam and Hawwa and are created from dust”.

As all human beings are vicegerents of Allah on earth and Allah wants to see his shadow in them, so all the human beings are equal and no one is superior to others. This principle can create an environment of harmony and positive competition in society.

Self-Respect

“O’people you are forbidden forever to harm the life, property, and honor of each other. These are as

sacred as this day of Hajj and this month of Zilhijja and this city of Makkah”.

Self-respect is a key to evolve a cultural setup to a great civilization. History shows that the major cause of the downfall of any civilization is dis-respectfulness of humanism.

Brotherhood

“All Muslims are brothers among themselves. They will look after, provide food, clothes and will be kind to each other”

Brotherhood leads to peace and peace is the basic criteria of sustainable development throughout the globe.

Women’s Respect

“Women depend upon you, therefore, it is your duty to treat them well. Women have acquired by you in the name of Allah, therefore, be fearful of Allah in their matters. Your women have your dependents and they have rights upon you. Women are the custodian of your rights. They cannot mistrust you. It is your duty to provide clothes and food to them as per the custom and tradition of the time”.

Today, women are an integral part of society and are considered to be the second wheel of a vehicle for development and progress. The yardstick for progress in developed society is mapped through the rights given to women.

Human Rights in Practice

Moulana Wahidud-Din Khan in his book “Paghambere-Inqilab” (The Prophet of Revolution) quoted the following events

During Prophet’s (SAW) era one of the women of influential tribe committed theft and was held red-handed. The case was brought into the court of Prophet (SAW) and he decided to cut her hand but some of the companions of the Prophet suggested taking lenient view due to her relations with the influential tribe. The Prophet (SAW) categorically rejected the argument and said that the previous Ummas were destroyed due to such deeds when an influential person committed any crime was dealt with leniency while they took severe action against

poor people. Listen if Fatima daughter of Muhammad (SAW) committed the same crime her hand also would be cut down.

In the like manner, Hazrat Abu Zar Ghiffari (R.A) said to one of the companions of the Prophet O'Black (as his color was black), when it was listened by the Prophet (SAW), he deadly disliked it and said that it is not the way to call someone in these words. Always address others with good names. Don't differentiate and discriminate between human beings, because there is no superiority of white over black. Hazrat Abu Zar Ghiffari (R.A) immediately felt his mistake and appealed to that very companion of the Prophet (SAW) to put his feet on Ghiffari's (R.A) face, in return.

Similarly, Hazrat Ali (R.A) stated that once Prophet Muhammad (SAW) borrowed some money from a rich Jew. After some days he came and asked for his money back before due time. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) replied that he had no money at the time and there was also some days remaining in promised date. But the Jew insisted and asserted that he would not leave him until the return of money. He remained with the Prophet (SAW) from afternoon till next day. It is amazing that during this period the Prophet was the head of state of Madina and he had the power to treat him in any way. The companions of the Prophet (SAW) intended to move him out, but the Prophet (SAW) forbade them and said, "I am not here for cruelty". The next day the Jew was much impressed by the behavior of the Prophet (SAW) and his companions towards non-Muslims and embraced Islam at the same place and presented all his wealth to the Prophet (SAW) for the cause of Islam.

The same spirit of Islam could be observed even after more than ten years of Prophet's demise when an influential chief of a tribe embraced Islam and during Tawaf (going around Kaaba seven times), the foot of an ordinary Muslim fell on his Ahra'am (the dress worn by pilgrims on entering Makkah). The chief gazed him with great anger and slapped him on the face. As a result, his nose fractured, he complained to Caliph Umar (R.A). He summoned the chief and said to him to compensate the person or be ready for the same payback. The chief said that he embraced Islam for the enhancement of his dignity

and honor but it is otherwise. Umar replied, 'you are right. The other person also embraced Islam for the same purpose. All have the same dignity and honor'.

All these three events are taken as a sample from the long history of the Islamic period, which has millions of such types of events that are directly related with human rights that lead to progress and sustainable development. Equality, self-respect, and justice that always bring peace and harmony in the society and these are considered to be the prerequisite for development and suitable environment for agriculture products and environment-friendly industrial zones in modern societies. All the modern states have copied the concept of human rights from the injunctions of Quran and Sunnah to incorporate a chapter of human rights in their respective constitutions. The efforts of Muslims in connection with human rights and sustainable development can be observed not only in the written form in the form of a charter of Madina, but also in practical form like Mawakhat (religious brotherhood) Madina and many others.

In the past, during peak Muslim era there was no gap between theory and practice, so far as the concept of human rights is concerned, but slowly and gradually the system was deteriorated and the world fell to slumber once again. Therefore, after "Renaissance" many practical efforts were made in the European continent to inculcate new force in the dead bodies of institutions, law, state, and individuals.

Human Rights, Sustainable Development and Modern Age

Magna Carta (1215)

The Magna Carta, or "Great Charter," was arguably the most significant early influence on the extensive historical process that led to the rule of constitutional law today in the English-speaking world.

Fundamental tenets of Magna Carta (1215) provided the roadmap for modern democracies and had provided the first definition of *Habeas Corpus* to English law books. According to this great charter, the rights of the church were protected, barons were given protection from illegal imprisonment, access to speedy justice, payments to the Crown by feudal were confined to certain limitations and liberty was given to English people.²⁸

Magna Carta has become a light of bacon in the dark not only for European people but also for the whole west. The intellectuals of that very age even today consider it a hallmark in the history of human rights and sustainable development for their respective nations. Magna Carta is the shortest representation of one of the segments of the Last Sermon of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). After that, the comity of the nation followed the same path in connection with human rights as they were aware of the fact that sustainable development is impossible without giving respect, equality, justice, dignity, liberty and democratic freedom to the people.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights has thirty articles and revolves around human rights that are prerequisite for sustainable development.²⁹

Equality, dignity, brotherhood, freedom, freedom of movement, no discrimination on the basis of race, language, sex, color, religion, political, national, social belonging or property are the basic human rights mentioned at the beginning of the charter. Right to liberty, asylum, life, and security are also given to all persons of the world. Slavery, cruelty, arbitrary arrest, exile and degrading punishment are prohibited. Right to marriage, right to property, freedom of worship, right to family life, right to education and also secured political and economic rights through UDHR.

All these human rights are the brainchild of human beings, while the human rights given in the last Sermon of Holy Prophet (SAWW) were revealed from Allah (as the Prophetic word is also revelation but un-recited) and He is the custodian of these human rights. On the contrary, the rights mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are guaranteed by those states that have ratified the charter.

Conclusions

The concept of human rights can be observed in all divine religion and all four divine books. But it is Islam which has elaborately encompassed all the aspects of human rights and has provided the infrastructure for sustainable development, progress, peace, harmony and prosperity of humanity. Islam has no

discrimination and provides and protects the rights of all irrespective of race, creed, color, and language.

The modern age was in beginnings in 1215, when Magna Carta was constituted and brains of that very time recognized the importance of sustainable development and felt that it would be impossible without honoring the human dignity of the people of the land. After the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the comity of nations was compelled to give top priority to human rights because today's criteria for aid are measured through yardstick of human rights throughout the globe. The most the nation favors the human rights the most the donor gives the aid, while a violation of human rights faces the repercussions in the shape of sanctions, blockade, and stoppage of the aid. The rights which the man conceived in 1215 and 1948, Islam disseminated the same even fourteen hundred years ago.

The concept of human dignity is crucial to all of mankind in all the times. Therefore it is obligatory to give due importance to all human rights in each and every atmosphere not only by the authorities but also the international institutions. The violation at any level can cause disruption, civil war, extremism, and terrorism, which leads to escalate world's power towards unwanted third world war. Contrary to this, if human rights will be honored then there will be peace tranquility and sustainable development that will ensure friendly atmosphere and observance of democratic norms and traditions.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) divided the population of the globe into two ideological groups on the basis of human rights and the concept of iron curtain was developed in the communist and capitalist world. This ideological conflict generated the concept of cold war and also gave the new perception to the concept of human rights in both the blocks. Meanwhile, the perpetual practical concept of human rights also prevailed in the Muslim world with rigorous force and progress. As a result, after the demise of the concept of cold war in the 1990s, the idea of Islamic human rights emerged as a champion to be followed for sustainable development under the umbrella of UDHR at the global level.

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