

Relevance of Religion-Islamic Perspective

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Equality of humankind is of prime importance today for, In order to have a just society there is a need to have equality of all humankind. In fact it has to be the equality before law. Islam emphasized on equality of people, irrespective of races, caste and tribes. The only criterion of merit is goodness and piety- colour or birth or rank, do not matter. The Persian, Byzantine and Roman empires were ridden with class hierarchy, sectarian prejudices and racial hatreds. Women in particular had few rights. Family, class and social connections determined privilege and promotion. History reveals that to those living under these societies the Islamic message of equality came like a breath of fresh air.

Gender Justice

Gender equality has gained momentum and significant importance in today's world. It's no secret that unfortunately gender justice or women's development is mainly confined to slogans and debates. Laws, which never get implemented, do not offer any benefits to women. We reached to a stage where we offer justice to women in theory. The GDP of any country included women's contribution. No country or society can have over-all development whether social, economic, political or general, unless the society is just and offer benefits to both men and women. The logic is simple. No society could possibly develop ignoring half of its population. A woman has a special place in society in Islam. She is not looked down if she is a widow or divorcee as we see in some of the societies. In fact Prophet Muhammad (S) encouraged marriage of widows. The Qur'an says: "Men will have a share of what they earn, and women will have a share of what they earn." (Al-Qur'an, 4:32).

The Islamic Shariiah recognizes full property rights of women before and after marriage which is denied by many societies. A married woman need not link her name with husband after marriage and can keep her maiden name.

Unfortunately justice was never done with women in most of the ancient societies. In Athens, the sole purpose of the life of woman was to serve man. She was not permitted to choose her husband nor was she having the right of inheritance. In Roman society a woman who is the best source of comfort, enlightenment and happiness was transferred from one man to another like chattel. Even in United Kingdom, Mr. Fawcett Millicent started the struggle for the suffrage of woman in 1897 by establishing National Union of Women's Suffrage. This Movement got a fillip and ultimately the British House of Commons passed Representation of People Act in 1918 with a majority of 385 votes against 55, by which the women above the age of 30 years were given the right to vote. Although this was seminal point for the acknowledgement of women's right of suffrage, yet they were not given the status equal to that of men because age limit.

Islam is more relevant today as compared to any law developed in the West in last few centuries and gave full right to women 1400 years ago when Quran says:

“And according to usage, women too have rights over men similar to the rights of men over women.” (Al-Qur'an, 2:228)

Islam never differentiates between men and women. Quran ordains:

“Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you be it male or female: you are members of one another ...”(Qur'an 3:195)

Allah SWT wants men to be just and kind towards women. He says:

“You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness that you may take away part of the marital gift you have given them except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them it may be that you dislike a thing and Allah brings about though it a great deal of good. (Qur'an 4:19)

Dowry system is still practiced in India today and there are many deaths related to this evil. Islam make it compulsory for man to pay Mehr to wife which could be in cash or kind like Gold, property etc., which is actually consideration for the contract of marriage.

JUST ISLAM:

Justice is the key word to examine any belief, life-style or religious dogma. Justice has gained significant importance in every sphere of life. From Monarchy to Democracy, Men's hegemony to gender equality, from Caste or tribal rule to equal status of all human being, from hostilities to tolerance, from closed societies to multi religious societies, we find a paradigm shift in the way world is governed or humankind lived today.

Unfortunately, there are some elements in our society that foster inter-faith hostilities. In schools they indoctrinated to distrust people of "other faith". The purpose is to promote strife between various communities for political gains which most of time results in communal hatred and clashes.

Islam stands for peace and justice. This is the religion of logics and it's tenets and beliefs satisfy a scientific mind. Islam neither rejects today's world in Toto nor does it seek to melt into it. Islam has fundamental resilience that enables it to adapt to changing times.

In today's world, what is significant or important is logic and simplicity in rules or dogmas, which a common man could grasp and understand. Anything that does not appeal to common sense has no place in today's society and sooner or later gets rejected. Islam is the religion of breathtaking simplicity. It has no complicated philosophy, no recognized hierarchy based on caste or wealth, no living spiritual head and no priesthood. In essence: One God, One Book and One prophet. Each Muslim has direct access to God and to His Book and through it : to Prophet.

In all the societies and laws we find different set of rules for rulers and common people. Islam has same rules for both. In fact history is replete with many incidences when a common man or woman has claimed against the Caliph who was the ruler and the caliph was called in the court and stood in accused box. Sometimes when the claim was found valid the judge had given verdict against the ruler.

Social Justice:

To be specific Islam is also a Sociology If you look at it from social angle. Islam generates specific social practices be it in manners, culture, language, food or jurisprudence. The

Prophet's of Islam encouraged every Muslims to greet one another warmly to express that everyone is equal, to avoid gossip and slander as they lead to unjust, to accept invitation to visit one another to create brotherhood, to call on those who are sick and to join funeral processions. It is also about children respecting parents and parents giving love and affection to children. Islam encourages social activity, a sense of community, a sense of belonging, and a sense of place. It shows remarkable resilience of Muslim communities through the ups and downs of history and in their changing situation in different non-Muslim societies. Islam in itself is a civilization and a philosophy of life. These teachings if practised could alone make our society happy and prosperous.

Its general notion that a large segment of Muslim population is hyper sensitive to religious dogma and would reject any pragmatic approach to the problems facing humankind or more particularly- Muslims, without offering any alternative solutions or would immediately put your faith into question if you express an opinion that does not agree with their pre-set notions. The fact is by and large Muslims are not averse to changes within the ambit of Islamic Shari'ah which again is quite elastic and adaptable to change.

Islamic laws appear harsh but the deterrent impact of Islamic laws is remarkably effective. In fact a law should be harsh to be more effective. What was wrong yesterday is wrong today and would remain so even tomorrow. Changing laws to accommodate wrongs would tantamount to making mockery of law and justice. For example look to the law of the land where drinking was a taboo and a crime in early years of post independence era; but gradually with changing times, licenses were granted to bars and hotels for serving liquor. A person drinking at a licensed bar does not commit a crime whereas the same person would be booked for a crime if he does so at another place that is not licensed. Of course with the changing time, the law needs some adjustments. The beauty of Islamic laws, which are divine in nature, is that there could be a slight re- interpretation of a law to suit changing times keeping the basic tenet intact but it has it's inherent elasticity and adapts to changing times. This is considered one of the most important features of any good law in today's world.

Recently a case received prominence in media where young girl was gang raped and the case is famous as NIRBHAY case. I observed in statements made by some of the authors

in their articles in newspapers where they said that Islamic laws in such cases are ideal. They are deterrent and no one would dare to commit such heinous crime again one a guilty is punished in public.

It was quite interesting to see debates on TVs where the moderator (a woman) asked men to change their mind-set instead of asking girls not to wear indecent dress. The thing they forget is human nature that cannot be change. Both men and women have different nature. Quran gives a simple solution to this problem we are facing today: It asks women to cover their bosom when they go out or in other words to dress decently and also asked men and women to lower their gazes.

The universal nature of humanity is underlined in Quran. God's purview and compassion is for every one –"All creatures". The world is not divided into North or South, an East and a West. On the contrary, these divisions are obliterated when Quran says: (Chapter 2 Verse 115)

To Allah belong the East and West. Whichever side you turn, there is Allah's countenance.

Justice:

A just society alone could remain in peace. Most of the problems human race is facing today are created by unjust be it in their own society or due to aggression by other powers. In Islam human life is most sacred when Quran says:

If anyone kills a person- Unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief, it would be as if, he killed the whole of mankind.(5:32)

Even while punishing the guilty, Islam believes in total justice. Chapter 16 Verse 126 of Quran says:

And if you punish, then let your punishment be proportionate to the wrong that has been done to you.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) always gave prime importance to peace and tranquillity. When he migrated to the city of Medina from Makkah, in the early years of Islam, he

made treaty of Hudaib with Jews, which was first of its kind. Since the Jews did not believe in him as prophet, they insisted that he should not sign the treaty, as Prophet of God. Prophet Muhammad agreed and signed the treaty as Muhammad the son of Abdullah which was his father's name. This gives a message that Muslims ruling the people should have to be tolerant, shun their egos and should always make amicable solution to any problem with generosity and wisdom.

Economic Justice:

Recently there was a news item in newspapers that world's half the wealth is amassed by 60 families whereas we find children dying of hunger and malnutrition each day. A poor man cannot borrow funds for his basic needs like housing without paying exorbitant interest. The banks are lending money at very high rate of interest encouraging customers to use credit cards which gradually accumulate cardholders borrowing to an extent where he/she is not in a position to service the debt and he is trapped. Despite huge income we find hundreds of banks failing each decade since they work against social justice and exploit people in need. Islam has forbidden Interest and allowed business to ensure that people in need are not exploited. It is for this reason that banks and governments have started a new form of banking called Islamic banking. Mr. Tony Blair the ex Prime Minister of UK said that he would make London hub of Islamic banking.

For Muslims who have income more than their needs there is a system of Zakat which such people have to pay for the society, for poor for social work. Islam encourages to give Zakat money first to your poor relatives, then neighbors and then to one's nearby areas so that the money is evenly divided among the people.

Islam gives right to women in inheritance too. She gets this right from various sources like father, mother, siblings, and husband. In fact she gets from more sources than a man could get.