

Justice in the Holy Qur'an: A Practical Approach

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Abstract

Justice is of utmost significance in the Holy Qur'an as it is concerned with one of the most crucial matters. The Qur'an emphasizes that the prophets had a fundamental responsibility to uphold justice. This study aims to offer a contemporary and practical interpretation of Quranic justice as a research problem. The primary objective of this article is to elucidate the theoretical and practical dimensions of justice and elaborate on its portrayal in the Holy Qur'an. To begin, a comprehensive literature review is conducted, identifying four interrelated Arabic concepts, which are commonly translated as "justice" in English. Subsequently, the article examines the concepts of justice in two distinct sections. The first section delves into the meaning of justice and explores its various theoretical dimensions as depicted in the Holy Qur'an. The second section illustrates the practical aspects of justice within the Holy Qur'an. From this analysis, it is concluded that considering these concepts as interdependent provides profound insights into the responsibility of both prophets and individuals to establish social justice. Furthermore, this article presents a novel definition of justice from a socio-political standpoint.

Keywords: Quranic justice, Quranic equity, Quranic fairness, social justice.

Introduction

Justice and its associated concepts hold immense significance in human societies and are addressed within religious traditions. The Holy Qur'an, like other sacred texts, places great emphasis on these matters. From a Quranic perspective, the realization of justice is considered a vital objective shared by all divine prophets. This notion is echoed in various sacred religious scriptures, which uphold values pertaining to justice and fairness. In Quranic ideology, justice emanates from God and permeates throughout the system of creation, urging individuals to uphold justice within human societies (Akhavan Kazemi 2015, 31-60).

The research problem at hand is to offer a contemporary and pragmatic interpretation of Quranic Justice. Consequently, the main question of this paper revolves around the theoretical and practical dimensions of justice within the Holy Qur'an.

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Following the literature review, this article presents a two-part analysis. The first part explains the meaning of justice and its various theoretical dimensions in the Holy Qur'an. The second part illustrates the practical aspects of justice in the Holy Qur'an. I conclude that Quranic justice can provide a comprehensive foundation for human society. Moreover, I present a new definition of Quranic justice with a socio-political approach.

Literature Review

Numerous books and articles have been dedicated to exploring justice in the Qur'an, offering diverse perspectives on the subject. This section provides a summary of the most significant contributions. Among the recent publications is *Political justice from the perspective of the Holy Qur'an* by Seyyed Bagheri (2018c), which offers a distinct approach distinct from the present article. Bagheri's work includes several chapters derived from previously published articles. Notably, one of these papers delves into the epistemological foundations of social justice, with a specific focus on the Qur'an (Seyyed Bagheri 2018a, 120-128). Another article explores the Qur'an's perspective on the "strategy of equalizing opportunities and facilities in political justice" (Seyyed Bagheri 2018b, 19-26).

Several authors have explored the relationship between justice and other concepts within the Qur'an. Bahrami, for instance, argues that justice holds greater significance than security in the Qur'an (Bahrami 2018, 54-75). Another paper seeks to clarify the concept of justice in the Qur'an by examining its semantics and the etymology of the term "qisṭ," which is translated as equity (Akhavan Tabasi 2018, 107-28). Furthermore, an additional article conducts a qualitative analysis of all Quranic verses pertaining to justice, deriving qualitative indicators to understand the meaning of justice in the Qur'an (Ahmadzadeh 2016, 30-55). However, the present paper adopts a unique approach to the issue of justice in the Qur'an, one that has not been previously explored in existing scholarship. Moreover, this article independently discusses the concept of equity and compares it to the concept of justice, which distinguishes it from other articles that lack a separate discussion on equity.

In Islamic and Quranic knowledge, there exist four concepts that closely resemble justice, leading to their occasional synonymic translation and interpretation. However, these four concepts are distinct from one another. The first concept, *'adl/adāla*, is commonly translated into English as "justice." The second concept, *īnṣāf*, is translated as "fairness." The third concept, *musāwāt*, is often translated as "equality." The fourth concept, *qisṭ*, is translated as either "justice" or "equity," although it remains unclear whether *qisṭ* possesses a precise translation in English and, if so, what it would be. To illustrate, various translations of the Qur'an were examined to determine how *qisṭ* is rendered in English. Pickthall (2001) translates *qisṭ* as "justice." Yūsuf 'Alī ('Alī 2001) similarly translates *qisṭ* as "justice," occasionally mentioning the original term (*qisṭ*)

in parentheses. Muhammad Sarwar (Sarwar 1981) and Arberry (1996) both translate *qist* as "justice." Mohsen Khan (Khan and al-Hilali 1999) translates some instances of *qist* as "justice" and others as "equity," while Sahih International (1997) exclusively translates *qist* as "justice." Nevertheless, I contend that none of the aforementioned translations can be considered an accurate rendering of *qist*. In this article, my focus will be on examining and analyzing the concept of *'adl*, as it serves as the primary synonym for justice.

Theoretical Aspects of Justice

1. The Concept of Justice and its Importance

The recurrent mention of, and emphasis on, the concept of justice in the Qur'an highlight its paramount importance in Islam. The term "justice" (*'adl*) appears fourteen times across twelve distinct verses, spanning seven different chapters of the Holy Qur'an (Abdolbaghi 1983, 448-49). Furthermore, derivatives of this concept are employed fourteen times within ten chapters of the Qur'an. In sum, justice is referenced on twenty-eight occasions, distributed across twenty-five verses and twelve chapters. Table 1 provides a comprehensive list of the relevant chapters and verses.

Table 1. Justice and its Derivatives in the Holy Qur'an

Chapter and Verse Number	Instances	Transliteration
Baqara (2):48,123	2	'adlun
Baqara (2):282	6	Bi-l-'adli
Nisā (4):58	4	ta'dilū
Naḥl (16):76,90	1	i'dilū
Ḥujurāt (49):9	4	'adlin
Nisā (4):3, 129, 135	1	'adlu
Mā'ida (5):8	5	ya'dilūn
Mā'ida (5):8	1	ta'dil
Mā'ida (5):95,106	1	wa-'adlan
An'ām (6):70	1	fa-'ā'dilū
Ṭalāq (65):2	1	li-a'dila
Mā'ida (5):95	1	fa'adalaka
An'ām (6):1,150		
A'rāf (7):159,181		
Naml (27):60		
An'ām (6):70		
An'ām (6):115		
An'ām (6):152		
Shūrā (42):15		
Infiṭār (82):7		

Justice holds immense significance in human society, arguably ranking as the most crucial issue. When we acknowledge that the devotion to God and monotheism are of utmost importance to Him, and that He dispatched prophets for this very purpose, it becomes apparent that: firstly, justice can be deemed nearly as significant as the divine prophets who were appointed to establish it (Quran 42:15). Secondly, religiosity, faith, and virtue are intricately intertwined with justice (Quran 5:8) in a manner where faith and religion would be incomplete without justice (Bahrami 2018, 58-62).

Another fundamental aspect highlighting the importance of justice is the explicit commandment from God Almighty for individuals to uphold what is essential in His eyes. Both Prophet Muhammad (s) and the people are instructed in the Qur'an to embody justice in all aspects of life (QURAN 16:90). This underscores the significance of justice within the Qur'an. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, in his interpretation of Chapter al-Ḥadīd (Quran 57:25), asserts that the purpose behind the revelation of divine books and the sending of prophets was to establish justice, making just policies a central component of divine religions. According to him, the divine sharia and the religion of God can only be realized where justice prevails (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1935, 14). Likewise, 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī holds the view that the primary objective behind the sending of prophets and divine books was to assist people in establishing justice and equity in society (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, n.d., 202; Sarkheel 2011). Fakhr Rāzī, a prominent Quranic exegete, considers justice as a trust that must be fulfilled. He argues that it is imperative to return this entrusted loan to its rightful owner, meaning that the rights of others should be determined justly. The responsibility of enacting justice lies with individuals, and rights should be restored to their rightful owners (Fakhr al-Rāzī 1999, 10:110). Other exegetes view justice as God's standard on the earth, which must be applied universally and consistently, even towards enemies (Suyūfī 1984, 12; Maybudī 1992, 438-39). Another reason for the significance of justice lies in the positive and beneficial outcomes it yields, encompassing all spheres of society (Ahmadi 2011, 93-110; Ahmadi 2012; Nour-Mohammadi and Aghapour 2012, chapter 1; Imani Jome and Ganjour 2013).

This article adopts two approaches to explore the meaning of justice in the Qur'an. Firstly, it examines the terminology employed by Quranic exegetes to describe the concept of justice, both in its entirety and in its various aspects. Secondly, it directly addresses the Quranic verses that mention the word justice and its derivatives.

2. Theoretical Meanings of Justice

In this section, we delve into the Quranic terms that exegetes have employed to convey the concept of justice. We aim to decipher the meanings attributed to these terms by the exegetes, who consider them either synonymous with justice or as encompassing certain aspects of its meaning. The Quranic notions that have been elucidated in relation to the concept of justice include the following. These terms are

often intertwined with justice and are frequently referenced alongside it, highlighting their interconnectedness and significance.

Qawām (Quran 25:67): *Qawām* has been defined as encompassing "righteousness and justice" along with notions of order, continuity, uprightness, and maintaining a straight path (Jorr 1997, 1675). Consequently, some exegetes have regarded *qawām* as synonymous with justice in this particular verse of the Qur'an (Hashemi Rafsanjani 1982, 61). The verse in question denounces extravagance and extremism, instead emphasizing the importance of *qawām* or justice.

Mīzān: This term carries the meanings of scale, quantity, and balance, and is often employed to refer to an instrument of measurement. Some dictionaries (Jorr 1997, 2000) and certain exegetes have equated *mīzān* with justice. For instance, Mullā Fath Allāh al-Kāshānī interprets the word *mīzān* in Chapter al-Ḥadīd (Quran 57:25) as social justice and order within society (Kāshānī 1985, 192). Additionally, the term *mīzān* is used in the Qur'an to symbolize a specific balance in the creation of the heavens and the earth, which is founded on justice (Quran 55:7) (Ṭabāṭabāī 1986, 202).

Istiwa': The terms *istiwā'* and *siwā'* both convey the idea of a middle way, equilibrium, equality, and balance. Consequently, *istiwā'* is closely associated with the concept of justice. This concept is mentioned in three verses of the Qur'an (Quran 87:2; 20:5; 19:43) and can be understood as denoting coordination, balance, and justice.

Wasat: The term *wasat* signifies the act of avoiding extremes and deviations, and instead embracing a path of moderation and righteousness, a straight path. Quranic interpreters have pointed out that in the Qur'an (Quran 82:7), the term *wasat* carries the meanings of being just, moderate, and upright.

Thus far, we have elucidated five distinct meanings of justice, which can be summarized as follows:

1. An order that keeps a system running, upstanding and right;
2. Scale, method, and instrument of measurement;
3. Harmony and balance;
4. Equality;
5. Avoiding extremes and prescribing moderation.

In addition, in the Holy Qur'an, the concept of justice is used to refer to contexts other than the social context. These meanings are as follows:

1. Justice in creation: The Quran also mentions the justice of God (Quran 6:115) and justice in the creation (Quran 82:7) as additional dimensions of justice. These references highlight that justice extends beyond human societies and encompasses the entirety of creation.
2. Equivalent or substitute of something: Certain verses of the Qur'an (Quran 2:48; 2:123; 6:170; 5:95) employ the concept of justice to denote a substitute or equivalent for something, such as a ransom or similar compensation.

3. Deviation: Another significance of the term "adl" in the Qur'an is associated with deviation and regression from a particular path. It is also used to denote incorrectness and infidelity (Quran 6:1; 7:159; 4:135).

Moreover, the concept of justice in the Qur'an involves additional partial and secondary meanings, such as the practice of equality and moderation, maintaining integrity, neutrality, balance, and efficiency. These aspects contribute to a comprehensive understanding of justice as portrayed in the Qur'an (Khosropanah, Pourezzat, and Mohammadnejad Chavoshi 2014, 56-57; Pourezzat and Alipour 2013, 23-24).

Practical Aspects of Justice

1. General Social Meaning

To comprehend Quranic verses concerning social justice, the primary approach is to examine the verses that specifically address social matters and mention justice. Several indicators provide insights into the realization of social justice and shed light on how and when it is achieved (Khandoozi, Mostafavi, and Sarabadani 2019, 258-59).

According to some Quranic exegetes, one of the significant connotations of justice is moderation and balance (Bayḍāwī 1998, 238). This interpretation aligns with the common understanding of justice. Certain verses provide indirect hints regarding the concept of social justice. For instance, in one such verse (Quran 16:90), justice is contrasted with "prostitution," "vice," and "crime" (*baghy*), implying that justice cannot be equated with any of these three (Jorr 1997, 1559). Prostitution refers to adultery and sin, vice encompasses indecent and illegitimate actions (Abdolbaghi 1983), and *baghy* refers to rebellion, crime, and social injustice (Abdolbaghi 1983, 457). While these three concepts share similarities, the first pertains to individual human life, the second relates to social tendencies of human beings, and the third includes broader social aspects of life. Therefore, in this verse, justice indirectly signifies "abstaining from vice, improper actions, and injustice in both individual and large-scale social interactions."

The essence of justice is further exemplified in another verse (Quran 16:76) where justice signifies an absolute superior quality and the right path. The superiority of justice can be extended to all aspects of human life, particularly within society. In this verse, justice is portrayed as the rightful path, while its antithesis is likened to a futile and unproductive individual who, despite all endeavors, remains incapable and offers no utility. In essence, justice embodies the attributes of capability, creativity, and dynamism that generate and serve as a source for numerous positive outcomes and contributions.

2. Areas of Justice

The Qur'an consistently emphasizes the importance of justice, portraying it as an obligatory principle that must be upheld in all aspects of human affairs (Pourezzat and Alipour 2013, 81-95). The Qur'an addresses various domains of human affairs, including but not limited to:

The realm of private life: Private life encompasses the personal domain of individuals, wherein marital matters hold significant importance. Justice finds its foundation and significance within this sphere. The Qur'an guides Muslims that if they have concerns about being unable to maintain justice in a marriage, they should refrain from entering into it (Quran 4:3, 129). This verse highlights that justice comes into play when an individual's personal sphere becomes intertwined with another individual's. Naturally, as the number of individuals increases, so do the complexities and issues that arise among them, necessitating a more intricate form of justice to address and resolve these challenges.

Sphere of relatives and friends: This domain pertains to practicing justice in relation to one's relatives, close friends, and supporters. Of particular significance within this sphere is the commitment to justice, even if it goes against one's personal interests and those of other relatives and friends (Quran 6:152). Close friends typically refer to individuals who share similar beliefs, belong to the same professional guild or group. The mentioned verse emphasizes that justice must prevail, regardless of its impact on the individual, their parents, or their relatives. Neither wealth and influence nor poverty and deserving sympathy should influence the dispensation of justice (Qurṭubī 1985, 410; Tha'labī 2002, 399; Ibn al-'Arabī 1998, 507-10; Fakhr al-Rāzī 1999, 10:320).

Courts and litigation sphere: A significant aspect of justice lies in upholding fairness in testimonies (Quran 5:8), which plays a crucial role in ensuring the realization of justice. Testimonies serve as the basis for determining subsequent court rulings, and if testimonies are not just, it can result in a chain of injustice and cruelty.

Social interactions sphere: The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of committing to justice and implementing mechanisms and policies rooted in justice within social interactions and the broader social sphere (Quran 2:282).

Social conflicts sphere: In situations where social disputes arise within Islamic society that have the potential to escalate into armed conflicts, it is incumbent upon individuals to strive for reconciliation grounded in justice. Both parties involved should be willing to accept fair regulations and seek compromise (Quran 49:9).

Arbitration and judgment sphere: Judgment and arbitration are integral aspects of social systems and are present in various societies. The Qur'an provides significant guidance regarding justice in *ḥukm*, which encompasses both arbitration and judgment. The Qur'an emphasizes the utmost importance of unwavering commitment to justice when formulating rulings (Quran 4:58).

Enemies and non-Muslims sphere: Enmity is an unfortunate aspect of human societies, and while Islam condemns it, it acknowledges the existence of this social reality and seeks solutions to address it. In this context, justice assumes a vital role as it should be applied even to enemies, ensuring that animosity does not lead to a departure from justice or unjust treatment of opponents and enemies (Quran 5:8) (Ahmadzadeh 2016, 47). This principle of justice extends to international relations as well.

Figure 1 illustrates the comprehensive nature of justice as outlined in the Qur'an, encompassing all aspects of human affairs, ranging from the most personal and minute details to the most significant and crucial matters.

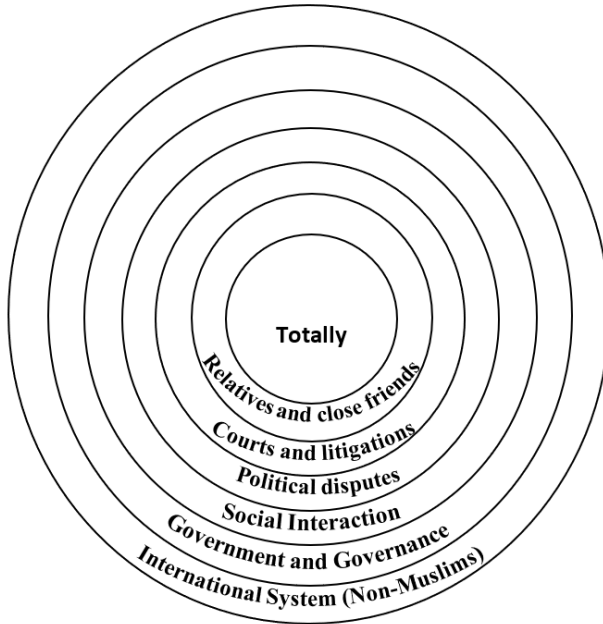


Figure 1. Spheres of Justice in the Holy Qur'an

3. The Principles of Justice

Drawing from Quranic verses that shed light on the nature and essence of justice, the following principles can be deduced regarding the observance of justice in the aforementioned spheres:

1. Individuals bear the responsibility of upholding justice in their personal lives. They should exercise caution and strive to refrain from engaging in unjust behavior during their personal interactions (Quran 4:129).
2. The significance of justice is heightened when it involves orphans and individuals who lack capability, influence, and social advantages. Consequently, justice holds greater relevance for the most vulnerable segments of society (Quran 4:129).
3. Ethnic, tribal, familial, ideological, religious, political, and party affiliations should not hold any sway over the execution and practice of justice (Quran 6:153) (Kuzegar 2016, 13).
4. Political and social pressures, the exertion of influence by individuals with wealth and power, and the fear of potential criticism should not influence the fair treatment and implementation of justice (Quran 5:8).

5. Justice takes precedence over knowledge. This verse of the Qur'an says that writers should write justly because information is not necessarily followed by justice (Quran 2:282) (Rashīd Riḍā 1994, vol. 3, 120; Javadi Amoli 2007, 622).
6. In matters of judgment and governance, individuals are presented with two choices: either to rule based on justice or to abstain from ruling altogether (Quran 4:58; 5:42) (Seyyed Bagheri 2017, 139-40).
7. It is crucial to treat opponents and enemies in a just manner, and the provision of fair treatment to them holds even greater significance than in other areas (Quran 5:8) (Hashemi Rafsanjani 1995, 270; Rashīd Riḍā 1994, 6:274; 11:120; Ṭabarī 1992, 6:91; Ṭabrisī 1971, 3:461).
8. It is imperative to eliminate all factors that contribute to injustice. For a comprehensive examination of the obstacles to justice and strategies for its implementation, along with the development of clear guidelines for individuals and governments, refer to Ahmadi (2012, 93-110) and Seyyed Bagheri (2017, 58-59).
9. In light of the preceding analysis, we present the following definition of justice based on the Qur'an:

Justice is a dynamic process rooted in principles of equality, capability, and benevolence. It embodies equilibrium, balance, moderation, and the prevention of corruption. Justice fosters harmony, order, consistency, and the establishment of societal well-being across all aspects of human life, ranging from the most personal to the far-reaching realms.

Conclusion

Justice possesses three significant characteristics: Firstly, it holds relevance in communication and interactions with others, with its highest manifestation found within the realms of politics and society. Thus, the political and social nature of justice stands as its most crucial aspect. Secondly, within Shia theology, justice is perceived as a rational and inherently human phenomenon. This suggests that even if divine religions did not address or advocate for justice, human reason would inherently demand its pursuit. Thirdly, no individual considers themselves unjust. Even those who are oppressive or governing in unjust manners perceive themselves as just or advocate for justice. Hence, justice requires tangible indicators. In this regard, it necessitates objective and practical frameworks, principles, and rules that distinguish justice from injustice. This serves as the initial step towards the implementation of justice.

Another significant aspect that warrants consideration when discussing justice in the Holy Qur'an is the unfortunate occurrence of numerous atrocities and crimes committed in the name of Islam and the Qur'an within Islamic countries. Presently, several Islamic nations face a multitude of challenges, such as violence, insecurity, poverty, and deprivation. It is evident that if these countries genuinely embraced the concept of justice

as outlined in the Qur'an and implemented it in their governance and societal structures, they would not find themselves in such a state of turmoil and disorder.

According to the Quranic perspective, justice is a distinct form of behavior and an ongoing process rooted in the capacity to create and promote goodness. It fosters order, stability, and harmony in human affairs by maintaining equilibrium, moderation, and preventing corruption. Justice encompasses all aspects of human life, ranging from the most personal to the most public spheres.

The Holy Qur'an contains additional concepts that are synonymous or similar to the notion of justice. Notably, concepts such as fairness, equality, and equity are complementary to the central concept of justice. Each of these concepts plays a distinct role in designing an efficient and dynamic system. While these related concepts are significant, this article focused solely on exploring the concept of justice due to limitations in scope.

In this article, we have examined various interpretations and definitions of justice based on the perspectives of scholars and the Quranic verses themselves. The topics covered have provided a solid foundation for identifying indicators of justice. Additionally, the article has expounded upon eight principles of justice with practical applications. Finally, a preliminary definition of justice has been provided based on the preceding discussions.

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