

Islamic concept of human discrimination

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Abstract:

Allah created all the human beings from the single couple. As per the requirement of His wisdom, he made them in diverse colors, races, tribes and families, to test them. Moreover, humans are also different regarding languages and dialects they speak, but success and eternal salvation is not dependent on any of these. Therefore we cannot discriminate the humans on the above mentioned differences, for they have no free will in all these. Taqwa (piety) is the only standard for achieving and enjoying high status in this world and hereafter, which is attainable for all. So we can judge and discriminate the children of Adam on the bases of piety. The given article discusses this point and proves with arguments and reference from Quran and Hadith that the Islamic concept of human discrimination is based on faith, righteous deeds and piety only, and nothing else.

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Allah created human beings as the best creature, appointed him as vicegerent to maintain spiritual and temporal order under the commandments of Allah. Even the angels were ordered to prostrate them before Adam, though such a prostration cannot have been intended as an act of worship. It was just an act of courtesy or way of showing one's respect. Similarly Allah blessed the children of Adam with honor and dignity. Quran says:

“وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ”¹

“And we bestowed dignity on the children of Adam”.

Allah is the sole creator of the whole mankind. He created them all from the same couple, as Quran mentions:

“يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً”²

O Men, fear your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and from it created its match and spread many men and women from the two”

Division of humans in different castes and tribes is not for superiority but for the sake of identification. All have the same origin. Quran refers to the same idea.

“يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا
إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰ - إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ”³

“O Mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into races and tribes, so that you may identify one another. Surely the noblest of you, in Allah's sight, is the one who is most pious of you. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

The verse clearly shows that the standard for being superior and dignified is Taqwa (piety), which is attainable by making efforts. Following saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ also refers to the same concept that human discrimination is not based or color on race, but on piety.

“An Arab has no preference over a non Arab, or a non Arab over an Arab; nor a white man has any preference over a black one, or a black over a white man but due to piety”⁴

Similarly in another hadith, it is said:

“Whose actions and deeds make him slow (back), his noble race cannot make him move fast (forward)”⁵.

As we see in the case of Hazrat Bilal, one of the close and famous companions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. He was black by complexion, non Arab and even a slave, but by making efforts, he achieved high level of faith, righteous deeds and piety, so he received the good news (here in the world) to be in the paradise.

He became the Muazzin of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Even hundred years after and thousands miles away, the Muslims remember his name with honor and respect. Similarly Salman was from Persia and Sohaib belonged to Rome, but they achieved great honor and exalted position here and hereafter on the bases of true faith, righteous deeds and piety. On the other hand Abu Lahab, who was the citizen of the most sacred city, Makkah (the city of peace). He belonged to the noble tribe of Quraish and family of high status i.e Hashim, but for being non believer, evil deeds, mischievous nature, he fall victim to disgrace in this world and to eternal punishment in the hereafter. Allah says in the holy Quran. **“مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَ مَا كَسَبَ.”**⁶

“Neither his wealth benefited him, nor what he earned”

Similarly Islam does not recommend any discrimination in the result or reward of the doers on the bases of gender. Allah declares in the Holy Quran:

“مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَ بَوَّأَهُمُ اللَّهُ صَالِحًا مِّنْ أَيْنَ شَاءَ وَ هُوَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ - وَ لَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ”⁷

“Whoever, male or female, has acted righteously, while being a believer, we shall certainly make him live a good life, and shall give such people their reward for the best of what they used to do”

However due to difference in physical structure and mental level, the nature of responsibilities of both sexes is different.

Moreover Islam does not divide and discriminate among humans on the bases of different languages and colors. In fact the existence of different languages is one of the signs of the (Qudrat) of Allah as is mentioned in the holy Quran:

“وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاخْتِلافُ اَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَالاوانِكُمْ اِنَّ فِي ذَلكَ
لآيَاتٍ لِّلْعالمِينَ”⁸

“And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the difference of your tongues and colors. Surely in this there are signs for the persons having knowledge”

Islam divides and discriminates humans on the bases of ideology. The concept of human discrimination is based on the difference of faith, beliefs and actions. All humans will be placed in different categories according to their performance. Quran says:

“وَلِكُلِّ دَرَجَتٌ مِّمَّا عَمِلُوا ۗ وَ ما رَبُّكَ بِغافِلٍ عَمَّا يَعمَلُونَ”⁹

“For all people, there are ranks according to what they did, and your Lord is not unaware of what they do.”

The Holy Prophet ﷺ said:

“Allah does not see at your faces and your riches, but He sees the sincerity of your hearts and the nature of your deeds.”¹⁰

The center of faith is heart, while actions and deeds are performed by other organs. Faith plays the role of a foundation stone for the actions of humans. The success or failure of humans depends on faith and actions. Allah has gifted all the human beings with a single heart irrespective of their cast, creed, color, religion and status etc. Quran mentions this fact:

“ما جَعَلَ اللهُ لِرِجُلٍ مِّن قَلْبَيْنِ فِي جَوْفِهِ”¹¹

"All has not made for any man two hearts in his chest cavity."

So all the humans have a center where faith is to be put. Similarly the sources of attaining success have also been provided to all of them, irrespective of tribe, cast, language etc. Quran says:

“قلنا اهبطوا منها جميعاء فاما ياتينكم مِّنِّي بُدَى فَمَن تَبِعَ بُدَايَ فلا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ ولا هُمْ يَحزَنُونَ”¹²

We said, “Go down from here, all of you then should some guidance come to you from me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.”

The word “من” is common, includes every one. Anyone who follows the guidance sent by Allah will certainly enjoy peace, tranquility and prosperous life as promised by Allah in the holy Quran. But it is a fact and the Holy Quran has already informed us that all the human beings will never be equal and similar, regarding their faith and actions/deeds. Quran Says:

”بَوَّأَ الَّذِينَ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ فَمِنْكُمْ كَافِرٌ وَمِنْكُمْ مُؤْمِنٌ -”¹³

“He is the One Who created you, then some of you are disbelievers, and some of you are believers.”

“Allah bestowed man with the purest and best nature, and man’s duty is to preserve the pattern on which Allah has made him. By making his vicegerent, Allah exalted him in posse even higher than the angels, for the angels had to make obeisance to him. But man’s positions as vicegerent also gives him will and discretion and if he uses them wrongly he falls even lower than the beasts.”¹⁴

Quran divides and discriminates the humans on the bases of this difference and makes us understand that people having different/opposite faith can never be equal or uniform. It mentions:

”أَفَمَنْ كَانَ مُؤْمِنًا كَمَنْ كَانَ فَاسِقًا ۚ لَا يَسْتَوُونَ”¹⁵

“So, can one who is a believer become like one who is a sinner? They cannot become equal.”

At same other occasion, the Holy Quran gives the same idea:

”أَوْ مَنْ كَانَ مَيِّتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِّنْهَا - كَذَلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ”¹⁶

“Is it (Conceivable) that the one who was dead and to whom We gave life, and set for him a light with which he walks among men, (is held to) be like the one whose condition is such that he is in total darkness, never coming out of it? This is how their deeds appear beautified to the disbelievers”

In short, both types of people can never be equal. Then who is preferred and liked by Allah Almighty? Quran announces this decision very clearly:

“وَلَعَبْدٌ مُّؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ مُّشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ”¹⁷

“A Muslim slave is better than a polytheist, even though he may attract you.”

For further clarification of the Islamic concept of human discrimination, see the following verse: “وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ”¹⁸

“The blind and the sighted are not equal.”

In Tafseer Mazhari, Qazi Sanaullah Panipatti comments on this verse and says

that the word ‘A’ma’ (اعْمى/blind) refers to that unwise, fool and superficial person, who does not use his intellect, nor he ponders. On the other hand the word ‘baseer’/ بصير does not mean a person having eyesight only, but it denotes a person having depth and insight, who understands the reality, philosophy and requirements of worship and knows well, who deserves to be worshipped, and who is the actual doer.”¹⁹

“Amin Ahsan Islahi also gives nearly the same explanation and says that:

‘A’ma’ refers to a person who is blind by heart and mind while ‘Baseer’ means a person, who has depth and insight besides eyesight”²⁰

While it is reality that being justice, generous and merciful, Allah has provided all the humans with the resources to observe and identify the reality. Quran says:

“قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَصَائِرُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَ مَنْ عَمِيَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِيظٍ”²¹

“(Say, O Prophet) There have come to you insights from your Lord. Now, whoever uses his sight does so for his own self, and whoever remains blind does so against his own self. I do not stand guard over you “

Obviously when all the children of Adam do not use the available resources in pursuit of the ultimate reality and they are not similar

regarding their faith and deeds, so their result will be certainly different from one another. A person who ponders and uses his intellect in right direction is far better than thousands of laymen. Abdullah bin Abbas (R.A) a companion of the holy prophet ﷺ narrates

That a single ‘faqih’ (jurist) is harder against satan than one thousand worshipers.²²

It means that for satan it is easy to cheat a thousands of (non scholars) worshippers, but difficult to deceive that scholar, who understands the whole religion. This denotes that all the human beings will not be equal, so their protocol and treatment towards such people will also be different. Hazrat Ayesha (R.A) narrates

that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had ordered them to treat the people according to their status.²³

Similarly in the Day of Judgment result of the people will also be different, on the bases of differences in their faith, beliefs and actions. The Holy Quran mentions this fact in the following verse:

“أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَالْمُفْسِدِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ . أَمْ نَجْعَلُ الْمُتَّقِينَ كَالْفُجَّارِ”²⁴

“Shall we make those who believe and do righteous deeds equal to those who commit mischief on the earth? Or shall we make the God-fearing equal to the sinners?”

Certainly they will never be mixed up. The following verse of the holy Quran further clarifies this point:²⁵ “وَامْتَاذُوا الْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ”

“And (it will be said to the infidels,) “Get apart (from the believers) today O the guilty ones”

Another verse refers to the difference in result:

“فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ”²⁶

“One group of people will be in Paradise, and another group in blazing Fire.”

Now which group will be interred to paradise, and which one into the fire of hell? Quran guides us in this regard in the following verse:

“إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ . وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ”²⁷

“Surely the righteous will be in bliss and the sinners in Hell”

“If man rebels against Allah, and follows after evil, he will be abased to the lowest possible position. Those who use their faculties aright and follows Allah’s law will reach the high and noble destiny intended for them.”²⁸

Another verse also gives similar information:

“أَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ الْمَأْوَىٰ - نُزُلًا بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ - وَ
أَمَّا الَّذِينَ فَسَقُوا فَمَأْوَاهُمُ النَّارُ. كُلَّمَا أَرَادُوا أَنْ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَقِيلَ
لَهُمْ ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ”²⁹

“As for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for them there are gardens to dwell, as an honorable hospitality for what they used to do. And the ones who disobeyed, their abode is the Fire. Whenever they wish to come out from it, they will be turned back into it, and it will be said to them, “taste the punishments of fire that you used to deny.”

Regarding the different protocols of the two opposite groups in the hereafter, Quran delineates in some other verse it says about the blessed ones:

“ وَسَيَقَى الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ
أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ”³⁰

“And those who used to fear their Lord will be led towards *Jannah* (Paradise) in groups, until when they reach it, while its gates will be (already) opened (for them), and its keepers will say to them, “*salamun-‘a laikum* (peace be on you). How good are you! So, enter it to live here forever.”

And refers to the dwellers of *Jahannam* in the following verse:

“ وَسَيَقَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ زُمَرًا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا فَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ
يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ رَبِّكُمْ وَيُنذِرُونَكُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَكِن
حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ. قِيلَ ادْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا فَبِئْسَ مَثْوَى
الْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ”³¹

“Those who disbelieved will be driven towards *Jahannam* in groups, until when they reach it, its gates will be opened, and its keepers will say to them, “Did messengers from among you not come to you reciting to you the verses of your Lord, and warning you about the meeting of this day of yours?” They will say, “Yes (they did), but the word of punishment had become certain against those who disbelieved.” It will be said, “Enter the gates of *Jahannam* to live in it forever.” So, how evil is the dwelling-place of the arrogant!”

In short, all the humans are equal regarding their origin and creation. All have the same creator and master. All have been created from the same parents and in the same way. The fields of strengthening faith, making good deeds and achieving piety are equally open for all. After making proper arrangement of guidance and directions, Allah has invited all to the eternal dwelling of peace (paradise). Allah says in the Holy Quran:

“إِنَّا بَدَيْنَهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَ إِمَّا كَفُورًا”³²

“We have shown him the way to be either grateful or ungrateful”

So if the human opts for the right track he can be really termed as ‘the best of moulds’ (احسن تقويم) but if unfortunately he falls astray and wastes his potentials on a wrong track, then his ultimate and eternal dwelling will be ‘the lowest of the low’ (اسفل سافلين)

Being practically thankful to Allah almighty, if he invests his health and wealth on the real target, he may cross the angels. As the *Arsh* (deck) waved and moved at the death of Hazrat Saad bin Maaz (a close companion of the holy prophet SAW). On the other hand he may leave the animals far behind by misusing the capabilities in destructive activities. Allah says in the Holy Quran.

“وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ-لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا . وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا . وَلَهُمْ أُذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا . أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ بُمُ أَصْلٌ . أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْغَافِلُونَ”³³

“Surely we have created for Hell a lot of people from among Jinn and mankind. They have hearts wherewith they do not

understand, eyes wherewith they do not see, and ears wherewith they do not hear. They are like cattle. Rather, they are much more astray. They are the headless.

As Abu Lahab, (a staunch opponent of the Holy Prophet ﷺ)) whose real sons avoid to come close to him at his death, for his burial.

One will enjoy greetings of Allah almighty, as mentioned in Quran:

“سَلَامٌ - قَوْلًا مِّن رَّبِّ رَحِيمٍ”³⁴

“*Salam*” (Peace upon you) is the word (they receive) from Merciful Lord.

While to other Allah will not even talk with mercy Quran says:

“قَالَ اخْسَوْا فِيهَا وَلَا تَكَلِّمُونِ”³⁵

“He (Allah) will say, “Stay in it, humiliated, and do not speak to me. “

From all the above mentioned Quranic verses and argumentative details, it is clear that every individual deserves to enjoy equal respect and sanctity and be looked upon equitably and in high esteem and be provided with equal opportunity to get eternal success. But in taking advantage of the equal opportunity all the humans are divided. Some of them believe in the heavenly teachings and act accordingly, while some others challenge and even deny the very authenticity of these spiritual teachings. Hence the children of Adam move in the opposite directions regarding their faith, thoughts, ideas and actions. Ultimately both the groups reach their logical end and final destination of eternal success or failure.

When their real creator, master and sustainer treats them differently, as per their faith and deeds, so how can we (the weak humans) put them in the same category. We will certainly discriminate between the two opposite groups.

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