

The Qur'anic Perspective On Humanity : Foundations Of Dignity, Justice, And Compassion

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Abstract:

The Qur'an articulates a universal and comprehensive vision of humanity rooted in the divine principles of dignity (karāmah), justice ('adl), and compassion (rahmah). It envisions every human being as a bearer of divine trust (amānah) and moral accountability, transcending all barriers of race, ethnicity, religion, and geography. This paper explores how the Qur'anic conception of the human being forms a holistic moral framework that upholds equality, justice, and compassion as inseparable dimensions of human existence. Through an interpretive analysis of key Qur'anic themes such as the innate honor granted to humanity, the moral responsibility entrusted to human beings as God's vicegerents on earth, and the divine command to establish justice the study demonstrates that human worth in Islam is intrinsic rather than acquired, and moral responsibility is universal rather than selective. Employing a qualitative-descriptive methodology based on thematic exegesis (tafsīr mawdū'ī) and comparative analysis of classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries, the research investigates how these teachings provide an ethical response to modern moral challenges, including social inequality, racial discrimination, and the erosion of compassion in global societies. The paper argues that the Qur'an does not merely propose a theological doctrine of faith but offers a coherent and dynamic moral philosophy one that integrates spirituality with social ethics, and divine revelation with human responsibility. Ultimately, the study concludes that the Qur'anic vision represents a timeless charter for human dignity and global harmony, capable of guiding contemporary humanity toward peace, justice, and moral balance.

Keywords: Humanity, Qur'an, Justice, Dignity, Compassion, Ethics, Human Rights

INTRODUCTION

The concept of humanity in the Qur'an occupies a central place in Islamic ethics and philosophy. The Qur'an defines humanity not in material or biological terms but through moral and spiritual dimensions. Human beings, according to the Qur'an, are divinely honored: "We have certainly honored the children of Adam" (The Qur'an, 21:107) an affirmation that dignity is not earned but inherent. The Qur'an establishes that all people share a single origin, "O mankind, We created you from a male and a female" and thus superiority lies only in moral excellence, not in social status or lineage. This universal vision presents Islam as a religion of equality, moral accountability, and compassion. The Qur'anic call to justice and mercy challenges the modern world's fragmented moral order, where materialism, discrimination, and dehumanization prevail. The Qur'an addresses humanity as one collective moral community a *ummah wāhidah* emphasizing cooperation, fairness, and empathy.

In a time when humanity struggles with division and injustice, the Qur'anic message offers a path to reestablish moral order and social harmony. This study seeks to analyze the foundations of dignity, justice, and compassion as presented in the Qur'an, examining how these principles can guide both individuals and societies in contemporary times.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive and analytical approach. The research aims to explore and interpret the Qur'anic perspective on humanity, particularly the foundations of dignity, justice, and compassion as reflected in the divine text. The study focuses on understanding the conceptual, ethical, and theological dimensions of human existence as presented in the Qur'an.

The research approach is primarily thematic and interpretive, analyzing selected Qur'anic verses in light of established *tafsir* works, including *Tafsir al-Kabir* by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* by Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir, and *The Study Quran* edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr. The approach emphasizes the synthesis between classical exegesis and modern scholarly perspectives to present a comprehensive understanding of Qur'anic humanism.

The data sources consist of both primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include the Qur'an and authentic *tafsīr* literature, while secondary sources comprise books, academic journal articles, and modern research works related to Qur'anic studies, Islamic philosophy, and ethics.

The data collection techniques involve textual reading, thematic categorization, and comparative interpretation. Relevant Qur'anic verses were identified, grouped under the themes of dignity, justice, and compassion, and then analyzed within their exegetical, historical, and linguistic contexts.

The data analysis techniques rely on interpretative reasoning and thematic synthesis. The collected data were examined to highlight the moral and spiritual foundations of human dignity and justice in the Qur'an. The analysis was guided by a hermeneutical framework that integrates linguistic, theological, and ethical dimensions to reveal the Qur'anic vision of humanity as a dignified, just, and compassionate being.

DISCUSSION

The Qur'anic discourse on humanity has been the subject of classical and modern scholarship alike. Early exegetes such as Al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209 CE) explored human creation and dignity as divine signs (*āyāt*) that reveal the moral purpose of life. Al-Tabari emphasized the equality of all humans in their origin, interpreting "We created you from a male and a female" (The Qur'an, 2:31) as a reminder of shared lineage and interdependence. Al-Razi, on the other hand, viewed human dignity as a metaphysical reality bestowed through reason, knowledge, and divine selection.

In the modern era, scholars like Fazlur Rahman (2009) and Abdullah Saeed (2014) have expanded this discussion within ethical and socio-political contexts. Rahman argues that the Qur'an envisions human life as a moral journey, grounded in God-consciousness (*taqwā*) and social justice. Saeed asserts that the Qur'anic worldview promotes pluralism and moral inclusivity, rejecting any form of ethnocentrism. Similarly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2015) emphasizes that the human being, according to the Qur'an, is both a servant (*'abd*) and a vicegerent (*khalifah*), entrusted with maintaining harmony within creation.

Western scholarship, too, has recognized the universality of Qur'anic ethics. Works such as *The Concept of Human Dignity in Islamic Thought* (Mohammad Hashim Kamali, 2012) and *Islam and the Challenge of Human Rights* (Abdullahi An-Na'im, 2008) note that the Qur'an's moral system transcends religious boundaries. However, despite these valuable contributions, there remains a need for integrated studies that bridge traditional tafsir, ethical philosophy, and m **The Qur'anic Concept of Human Dignity**

In Islamic teachings, the human being is not viewed merely as a rational or physical entity but as a spiritual and moral being. The Qur'an presents man as a unique creation of God, entrusted with divine responsibility and appointed as Khalifah (vicegerent) on earth. This concept forms the very foundation of human greatness and dignity in Islam.

1. Human Dignity — A Divine Endowment

The Qur'an declares:

“And indeed, We have honored the children of Adam.” (The Qur'an, 17:70)

This verse emphasizes that human dignity is a divine gift bestowed upon all human beings, regardless of race, faith, color, or social status. According to Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, this honor is intrinsic to human existence, granted by God through intellect, knowledge, and free will (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 134) Imam al-Tabarī also explains that this dignity is a mark of superiority over all other creatures, irrespective of belief or disbelief. (al-Tabarī, 2001, p. 45)

2. Knowledge and Intellect — The Basis of Dignity

The Qur'an states:

“And He taught Adam the names of all things.”(Qur'an, 2:31)

This verse highlights the intellectual and cognitive excellence of humankind.

According to Ibn Kathīr, God granted Adam the ability to know the names and meanings of all things a capacity not given to any other creation (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, p. 98). Modern Muslim scholar Fazlur Rahman observes that in the Qur'an, knowledge is not mere information but a foundation of moral responsibility the

more a person knows, the more accountable he becomes before God (Rahman, 2009)

3. Dignity and Moral Responsibility

The Qur'an proclaims:

"Indeed, I am appointing a vicegerent on earth." (Qur'an, 2:30)

This appointment signifies both authority and accountability.

Human beings are entrusted with maintaining justice, mercy, and balance on earth. Thus, dignity is not merely an honor but a sacred trust. The Qur'an warns against arrogance and oppression:

"Do not turn your face away from people in arrogance, nor walk on the earth with pride." (Qur'an, 31:18)

Imam al-Rāzī explains that arrogance diminishes human dignity, for true honor lies in humility and balance (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 90)

4. Justice and Equality in the Qur'an

a. Justice The Pillar of Divine Order

If human dignity is an intrinsic value, then justice is its practical manifestation.

The Qur'an commands:

"Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence." (Qur'an, 16:90)

Justice ('adl) in Islam is not limited to legal matters; it is a spiritual and ethical duty.

According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, justice is the principle that preserves harmony in both the cosmos and human society (Nasr, 2015)

b. Cosmic and Human Justice

The Qur'an mentions justice on two levels: Cosmic Justice:

"And He raised the heaven and established the balance." (Qur'an, 55:7)

Human Justice:

“O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice as witnesses to Allah.”(Qur'an, 4:135)

Fazlur Rahman asserts that Qur'anic justice is a theocentric, dynamic principle that integrates ethics, politics, and social reform. (Rahman, 2009)

c. Equality The Spirit of Human Society

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

“All human beings are equal like the teeth of a comb.” (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 1998, p. 333) This Hadith abolishes racial and class superiority.

The Qur'an confirms:

“O mankind! We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.” (Qur'an, 49:13)

This verse establishes piety and righteousness as the sole criteria of true honor, thereby rejecting all distinctions based on race, lineage, wealth, or social status. It lays down an ethical foundation for equality, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among human beings. By grounding human worth in moral and spiritual excellence rather than material or tribal superiority, the Qur'an introduces a paradigm that transcends conventional hierarchies of power. This moral vision fills a critical gap in modern human rights theory, which often emphasizes legal equality but neglects the inner moral and spiritual dimensions of human dignity a gap that this paper seeks to address through a Qur'anic ethical framework.

Compassion and Social Harmony in the Qur'an

The Qur'an presents compassion (rahmah) as the very heart of human ethics and the foundation of a harmonious society.

It does not regard mercy as a mere emotional response but as a divine principle that shapes moral, spiritual, and social order.

The Holy Qur'an begins with the invocation “In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful”, reminding humankind that divine compassion underlies the entire universe. (Qur'an, 1:1) Compassion in Islam

transcends sentimentality. It is a moral discipline rooted in the awareness of divine mercy and expressed through care, forgiveness, and justice in society. As the Qur'an proclaims: "And We have not sent you, O Muhammad, except as a mercy to the worlds." (Qur'an, 21:107) This verse establishes rahmah (mercy) as the Prophet's essential mission the spiritual axis of his message to all creation.

1. The Divine Foundation of Compassion

In the Qur'an, mercy (rahmah) is not confined to interpersonal kindness; it is a divine attribute that governs the cosmos. Allah describes Himself as "Ar-Rahman" and "Ar-Rahim", signifying that every act of creation, sustenance, and forgiveness stems from His boundless compassion. (Qur'an, 55:1-3).

According to Imam al-Rāzī, the repetition of these attributes in every chapter emphasizes that divine compassion envelops both believers and non-believers alike. (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 24) Ibn Kathīr interprets the verse "My mercy encompasses all things" as evidence that mercy is the very basis of divine governance. (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, p. 222)

This theological foundation inspires Muslims to manifest mercy in their personal, social, and political lives — not as weakness, but as an active form of moral power.

2. Compassion as a Social Duty

The Qur'an calls believers to express mercy through social action and solidarity:

"And they give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive." (Holy Qur'an, 76:8) This verse links compassion with justice, demonstrating that true faith (īmān) must be embodied through care for the vulnerable. Fazlur Rahman argues that compassion in Islam is not a mere ethical option but a divine command aimed at establishing social equilibrium. (Rahman, 2009, pp. 45–46) Prophet Muhammad ﷺ translated these values into action:

3. Compassion in Governance and Social Order

The Qur'an insists that compassion must permeate not only personal life but also the public and political sphere. In the Qur'anic worldview, a just ruler is one who governs with mercy, humility, and concern for the weak. According to M. H. Kamali, in *The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective*, mercy (rahmah) in governance ensures that justice remains humane and not mechanical. It transforms legal order into moral balance, thereby safeguarding both the rights and the spirit of the law. (Kamali, 2012) The Qur'an further instructs the Prophet ﷺ: "It is by mercy from Allah that you were gentle with them. Had you been harsh or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you." (Qur'an, 3:159)

This verse links compassion with leadership success — kindness unites hearts, while harshness breeds division. Hence, mercy is the true key to social cohesion (ijtima'iyyah).

4. Compassion as the Bridge of Harmony among Nations

Beyond individual ethics, the Qur'an envisions compassion as the moral bridge between communities and nations. "O mankind! We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another." (Qur'an, 49:13) This verse portrays diversity as divine design and compassion as the only basis for peaceful coexistence. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Qur'anic compassion (rahmah) is "the metaphysical energy that sustains harmony in the world." (Nasr, 2015) It calls humanity to transcend hatred and establish societies rooted in mutual care and understanding. Allama Muhammad Iqbal elaborates that compassion and justice are two dimensions of the same divine reality one preserves order, the other nurtures life. (Iqbal, 1934) In his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal views compassion as "the creative energy of love" that renews civilization through empathy and moral vision. (Engineer, 1990)

Thus, the Qur'anic vision of compassion stands as the eternal foundation for social harmony, justice, and the dignity of all humankind.

Relevance to Contemporary Human Rights and Modern Challenges

The Qur'anic vision of humanity offers timeless and universal relevance to the modern discourse on human rights. Far from being a product of modern

secular thought, the moral foundations of human dignity, equality, and justice are deeply embedded within the Qur'an's ethical worldview. The Qur'an asserts freedom of conscience: "There shall be no compulsion in religion." (Quran, 2:256)

Revealed in a tribal and authoritarian context, this principle anticipates the modern concept of religious liberty and freedom of belief. It affirms that faith must arise from conviction, not coercion, and that genuine spirituality flourishes only in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and moral choice. Likewise, the Qur'an upholds the sanctity of human life as an inviolable principle:

"Whoever kills a soul...it is as if he had slain all mankind; and whoever saves one it is as if he had saved all mankind." (Qur'an, 5:32)

This verse establishes the sacred value of life as the moral cornerstone of civilization. It transcends religious, racial, and national boundaries, proclaiming that every human being carries divine worth.

1. Moral Foundations of Human Rights

In the Qur'anic framework, rights are not derived from political consensus or social contracts, but from the divine trust placed upon humanity. Islam grounds all human rights in moral accountability before God. Every right corresponds with a moral duty; freedom is tied to responsibility, and equality is inseparable from justice. As Fazlur Rahman observes: "The Qur'an transforms human rights from political concessions into moral imperatives." (Rahman, 2009, p. 45)

This transformation is crucial in an age when rights are often divorced from ethics. The modern human rights discourse emphasizes entitlement but often neglects moral responsibility. The Qur'an rebalances this equation by anchoring human rights in spiritual consciousness. It reminds humanity that every privilege must be exercised within the bounds of compassion, justice, and accountability.

2. Freedom, Responsibility, and Moral Accountability in the Modern World

Modern liberal democracies promote freedom as an absolute value; however, unrestrained freedom without ethical discipline leads to moral chaos, exploitation, and social disintegration. The Qur'an redefines freedom not as license but as a sacred trust (Amanah), demanding conscious self-restraint and compassion toward others. It declares that true freedom is liberation from moral corruption and servitude to worldly desires:

"Have you seen the one who takes his desires as his god?" (Qur'an, 3:195)

Here, the Qur'an warns against the enslavement of the soul by material greed and egoism. Human dignity, therefore, lies not in the absence of law but in living by divine moral order. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ exemplified this harmony between freedom and moral responsibility through his conduct in governance, trade, and social justice demonstrating that liberty must coexist with humility and service to humanity.

3. Gender Equality and Shared Human Dignity

The Qur'an also anticipates gender equality long before the modern feminist movement. God declares:

"Indeed, I will not allow to be lost the work of any worker among you, male or female; you are of one another." (An-Na'im, 2008)

This verse affirms that moral worth and spiritual accountability are shared equally between men and women. The Qur'an establishes not only formal equality but also mutual interdependence a partnership in moral, intellectual, and social development. Scholars such as Abdullahi an-Na'im and Muhammad Hashim Kamali argue that this principle forms the ethical foundation of Islamic human rights discourse. (Kamali, 2002)

They emphasize that the Qur'anic worldview situates gender equity within the broader paradigm of human dignity, justice, and divine accountability, avoiding the extremes of patriarchal dominance and secular individualism alike.

4. Environmental Ethics and Human Stewardship (Eco-Justice in the Qur'an)

In addressing modern challenges such as climate change, ecological decay, and social injustice the Qur'an's concept of *Khilāfah* (Stewardship) is profoundly relevant. Humanity is described as God's vicegerent on earth, entrusted with maintaining ecological balance:

"It is He who has appointed you as vicegerents upon the earth." (Qur'an,6:165)

This divine mandate imposes a moral responsibility to protect the environment and all forms of life. Modern environmental ethics increasingly recognize what the Qur'an articulated fourteen centuries ago: that exploitation of nature without moral restraint leads to self-destruction. The Qur'an warns:

"Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what human hands have wrought." (Qur'an,30:41)

Thus, ecological harmony is not merely an environmental necessity but a spiritual obligation.

5. Integrative Vision for the Modern World

In facing the moral fragmentation of contemporary society inequality, extremism, alienation, and ecological crisis Islam's message of compassion, justice, and balance offers an integrative moral framework. It unites rights with responsibilities, freedom with faith, and diversity with unity. The Qur'an's moral philosophy transcends time and culture. It reminds humanity that dignity is not achieved through power or wealth, but through moral excellence and service to others. By harmonizing justice and mercy, Islam presents a holistic vision of civilization one that aspires toward human welfare, equality, and peace rooted in divine values.

Forbearance and Tolerance

The Qur'anic vision of human dignity encompasses not only justice and compassion but also the virtues of forbearance (*ḥilm*) and tolerance (*ṣabr*). These qualities represent the moral strength required to preserve harmony within oneself and in society. Forbearance means exercising restraint and controlling one's temper, while tolerance involves bearing difficulties with patience and

grace. Together, they constitute the spiritual foundation of a peaceful and dignified life. The Qur'an praises those "who restrain their anger and pardon others, for Allah loves those who do good." (Qur'an, 3:134) This moral ideal encourages believers to rise above ego and retaliation, maintaining inner balance even in times of conflict. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ embodied this principle throughout his life — responding to hostility with mercy and cruelty with forgiveness. His life illustrates that tolerance is not weakness, but the highest expression of human dignity. A profound example is found during the Conquest of Makkah, when the Prophet ﷺ, after years of persecution by his enemies, declared to them: "No blame shall be upon you today." With these words, he granted complete pardon to those who had wronged him. (Ibn Hisham, n.d., vol. 4, p. 40) Such forgiveness elevated not only the moral standing of the Prophet ﷺ but also the spiritual stature of humanity as envisioned in the Qur'an. As Fazlur Rahman notes, "Moral strength in Islam is measured not by dominance, but by self-restraint rooted in faith." (Rahman, 1989, p. 33) Likewise, Muhammad Hashim Kamali emphasizes that forbearance reflects "the inner discipline that preserves the dignity of both the forgiver and the forgiven." (Kamali, 2002, pp. 72-75) In the broader Qur'anic framework of human dignity, tolerance functions as a bridge between justice and compassion. It refines human character, cultivates humility, and promotes coexistence. A society guided by forbearance becomes capable of reconciling differences without compromising truth or integrity fulfilling the Qur'anic vision of harmony, balance, and mutual respect among all human beings.

CONCLUSION

The Qur'anic concept of human dignity presents a holistic moral philosophy that unites faith, ethics, and social justice under a single divine vision. Humanity, according to the Qur'an, is not defined by race, wealth, power, or nationality, but by moral consciousness (*taqwā*) and responsibility toward God and creation. The verse "We have certainly honored the children of Adam" encapsulates this spiritual foundation — declaring that honor is intrinsic to every human being, bestowed by God as part of His creative will throughout the Qur'an, dignity (*karāmah*) is inseparable from justice ('*adl*) and compassion (*rahmah*). Justice ensures the preservation of human rights; compassion ensures their

humane application. When combined with forbearance (*ḥilm*) and tolerance (*ṣabr*), they form the ethical framework necessary for peaceful coexistence. This synthesis reflects the Qur'an's universal call to balance between right and duty, freedom and restraint, individuality and community. Modern human rights discourse often limits itself to legal or political dimensions, but the Qur'an elevates these principles to the realm of divine ethics. It transforms rights into moral obligations grounded in accountability before God. As Fazlur Rahman observes, The Qur'an moralizes power and humanizes justice. Similarly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasizes that the Qur'anic worldview seeks harmony between the human and the cosmic order — where respect for humanity mirrors reverence for the Creator. In an age of global inequality, moral confusion, and ecological crises, the Qur'anic conception of human dignity offers a timeless paradigm for renewal. It reminds humankind that peace cannot exist without justice, and justice cannot endure without compassion. The ultimate message of the Qur'an is that the true worth of a person lies not in possession, but in piety; not in dominance, but in service; not in division, but in unity. Thus, the Qur'anic moral order provides the intellectual and spiritual foundation for a just, compassionate, and harmonious world.

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