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## Understanding Essence of Character Building in Prophet's Concept of Social Justice

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**Abstract:** Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) presented Islam in the form of a movement that emphasized on practice rather than mere preaching. It aimed to create a class of people who will inspire others not by mere oration but with practical deeds. The important consequence of faith, as pointed out in Quran and later reiterated by Prophet, is enactment of good deeds. The enactment of good deeds will create an underlying atmosphere for justice. Social Justice, the fundamental tenet of Islam, could have been achieved only, when the cadre as well as followers of Islam had a very strong character and were committed towards enactment of good deeds. The Companions of Prophet were therefore, subjected to rigorous training owing to which they led their subjects by example. Character building based on learning by doing, was therefore bedrock of Prophet's training approach. The focus on Character building as a Prophetic proposition tended to diminish with time and reached an all-time low in various countries of Muslim world. This paper is an attempt to delve into essence of character building for achieving the goals of social justice as enjoined upon by Prophet. It will also explore the implications of not using the character building approach while dispensing social justice, and some possible remedies for character crisis in the Muslim world. The word 'Character' used in the paper is laden with meaning, which will unfold as the content of paper will progress.

**Keywords:** Social Justice; Character; Islam; Prophet

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**Introduction:** Social justice has been one of the guiding principles of all civilized societies. Plato in his book '*Republic*' envisaged an ideal but class oriented society wherein people were naturally unequal, yet justice was a paramount virtue to be administered by the best men who could be trusted for not abusing their powers. The people making highest contribution to their society would have the greatest share of monetary reward, honor and political office; says Aristotle in his book '*The Politics*'. Social justice includes within its ambit the idea of fair treatment of all and just distribution of benefits in order to create an egalitarian society. It impels to establish a just social order by favoring the removal of structural and systemic inequalities to ensure equalization of opportunities to the weaker and vulnerable sections of society, which either because of being subjected to social suppression or being the victims of varied kinds of disabilities and handicaps become vulnerable to discrimination, abuse and exploitation. There are two main approaches of administering social justice i.e., protective and preventive. At protective level, people are

safeguarded against abuse and exploitation and at preventive level, a set of conditions are created that may possibly ensure equality, freedom, fraternity and provide special opportunities to those who for some reason lag behind and are out of mainstream (Jose 2011: 17-19). In addition to these two approaches, restorative approach can be employed to provide resources to such people whose social functioning has got impaired and needs to be restored. Thus, Social justice in narrowest sense means rectification of injustice in day to day transactions of people, while as in broader terms, it refers to removal of imbalances in political, economic and social life of people.

Islam as a complete socio-politico-economic system is no different when it comes to upholding principles of social justice. It combines social and legal aspects of justice through its moral teachings and calls for working towards raising the morality among people, as is implicit in its teachings (Hassan 1971; Dean and Khan 2016). It has a rich history of social justice where race, caste, and other forms of inherent inequalities have no place. The merit on accounts of piety and piousness is the fundamental criteria of ranking. All people have been created alike and irrespective of their lineage, they stand in one row. In principle, the whole world is supposed to be based on equity and justice (Khan 2011: 20-24). The principle of Justice is central to Islam (Qureshi, 1982) and there is a correlation between the idea of transgression and philosophy of justice. Essentially, every sinful activity results in some kind of injustice to victim as well as the perpetrator, besides having tendency to result in social disorganization. Adultery, for instance, has been classified as one among the bigger sins that tends to destroy the age old institution of family, which is a basic unit of society. Thus, character has a strong relation with faith, especially with regard to person's belief about accountability on the Day of Judgment.

According to Ibn Khaldun<sup>1</sup> (d.1408), justice was central to the human society and in Muslim societies, its achievement depended on the application of *Shariah*<sup>2</sup> law to human affairs (Khaduri 1984). *Shariah* is essentially based on justice and if it is otherwise, there must be some kind of dilution in it. According to al-Afghani,<sup>3</sup> only a society that possessed higher religion was capable of establishing and maintaining justice. This higher religion indicated a system of life guided by piety, truth and justice where an attribute of character was important. It is antagonistic to system based on injustice, oppression and hegemony. Islam strongly denounces racism and has sought to make it irrelevant since its inception. It emphasized that nobody is born racist but is socialized to be so. It submitted to justice and discouraged personal whims and desires. Justice in Islam is an essential principle of social management and calls for minimizing natural inequalities through social security measures (Noor 1998). It calls for bringing an improvement in living conditions of the dispossessed sections of society and offers them opportunities of social mobility. Islam came up with the institution of *Zakat*<sup>4</sup> which provides a framework for economic justice and social security. To further strengthen this framework of economic justice, it was supplemented with the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibn Khaldun was an Arab historian and historiographer.

<sup>2</sup> Shariah is the religious law based on Quran and Hadith.

<sup>3</sup>Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was the political activist and Islamic ideologue in Muslim world particularly in South Asia, Middle East, and Europe.

<sup>4</sup>Zakat is a religious obligation for all Muslims who meet necessary criteria of wealth.

*Sadaqah*.<sup>5</sup> Islam doesn't encourage concentration of wealth in few hands through its prohibition of paying interest or resorting to hoarding of commodities. In addition, idea of justice was also taken care of at political level by having the system of *Shura*<sup>6</sup> in place, which provided scope for consultation amongst leaders as well as people.

**Methodology:** This study was broadly descriptive in nature and involved qualitative enquiry, predominantly making use of primary data from Quran and *Hadith* (corpus of Prophetic customs), constituting the primary source of knowledge about Islam. The published works on social justice and character building in Islam were employed to locate the primary data. A series of research papers and selected book chapters, relevant to the subject of the paper were perused through systematic review and constituted the secondary data. The verses of Qur'an and traditions of Prophet directly emphasizing on social justice and character building were analyzed for their meaning and interpretation and later used to support arguments and assertions. In order to comprehend the verses of Qur'an, the help of translations and exegeses was taken. The use of stray translations was avoided to do away with distortion of meaning of verses. Some of the prominent translations that were perused included the one authored by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, and Sahih International. The exegeses used included the ones authored by Ibn Kathir, Maulana Maududi and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi. With regard to *Hadith*, six canonical<sup>7</sup> books along with their exegesis were used for reference. The broad research question of the paper was to find out if focus on character building can help in realizing the objectives of social justice, as ordained in Islam and if addressing the problem of character crisis can help in initiating the reform process in Muslim world. Additionally, the paper also attempts to delineate the theoretical relation between social justice and character building; besides examining what went wrong with Muslim world that led to imminent character crisis. The study used Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for collection and utilization of data vis-à-vis the subject of study. The various published studies were listed on the basis of their relevance to the research question of this paper. The listing of studies was done on the basis of their titles. The studies so listed were subjected to examination of abstracts and conclusions and some were excluded on this basis. It was only after this examination that the next stage filtering of the selected studies was done through study of their full length contents. The studies finally selected after full length examination, were considered for reference throughout the course of this work. There were very less studies which had explored the relation of social justice and character building directly. This made the work of this author more challenging. However, good numbers of studies with thematic focus on social justice were found.

It must find a mention here that one can claim no authority when it comes to researching on Islam. It is based on the premise that truth is infinite and any attempt to reveal it will require use of multiple methodologies and the positivist scientific methodology offers no panacea for a problem at hand, although it may help in understanding a particular aspect

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<sup>5</sup> Sadaqah is a voluntary offering by Muslims, where the amount is at the discretion of benefactor.

<sup>6</sup> Shura is an Arabic word for consultation.

<sup>7</sup> Canonical books of Hadith are six in number and include Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan al-Nasa'i, Sunan Abu Dawud, Sunan al-Tirmidhi, and Sunan Ibn-Majah.

of reality. The elements of objectivity and subjectivity cannot be strictly separated as is the case in positivist scientific research. The reality may be different from perceived reality (Nasr 1998). Thus, the lack of advanced training in Islamic Research methodology posed a serious challenge to this author, having studied general methodology in Social Sciences, which is essentially based on positivist scientific method. Another serious limitation this author faced during the preparation of this paper was lack of proficiency in Arabic language, which was the language in which the primary data of this paper was available. This author being a practicing Muslim had a very difficult task to attempt avoiding inherent biases and hence the clarity in methodology assumed extra importance.

**Prophet's Concept of Social Justice:** Prophet Muhammad was born in a society which was replete with ignorance, oppression and injustice. He therefore sought to establish order and harmony within which a distinct standard of justice could be achieved. His sense of justice was broadly based on the pronouncements of Quran. It was under his leadership that the tribal areas of Arabia were organized into civilized society based on truth, liberty, equity, and fraternity. Qur'an, which was the focal point of Prophet's *dawah*<sup>8</sup> mission, admonishes around two hundred times against injustice and oppression, expressed in Arabic words such as '*zulm*', '*ithm*', '*dalal*' etc. besides mentioning almost hundred times about notion of justice using direct words from Arabic such as '*adl*', '*qist*', '*mizan*' and additionally referring to it indirectly as well (Khaduri 1984). Some of the selected verses of Quran directly calling for justice are as:

"You are the best community that has been raised up from mankind. You enjoin right conduct and forbid wrong" (3:10).

"O mankind: fear your Lord who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate, and out of the two, spread many men and women. Fear Allah in whose name you plead for rights, and heed the ties of kinship. Surely, Allah is ever watchful over you" (4:1).

"Indeed, God commands you to render back trusts to whom they belong, and when you judge between people, that you judge with justice"(4:58).

"O you who believe! Stand up firmly for Allah as just witness and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety; and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is well acquainted with what you do" (5:8).

"Let there arise out a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong"(5:44).

Prophet supplemented the idea of social justice enunciated in Quran with his traditions (*Hadith*). There are around 40 prominent traditions pertaining to different aspects of social justice narrated by various companions and documented in canonical books (Suleiman: 2017-18). In one of the traditions (narrated by Aisha) pertaining to a woman from *Banu*

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<sup>8</sup> Dawah means preaching Islam to people.

*Makhzum*<sup>9</sup> seeking clemency for having committed theft, Prophet delivered a historic judgment, thereby setting standard of justice delivery for *Ummah*.<sup>10</sup> The excerpted part of the *Hadith* reads as:

“What destroyed the nations preceding you were that if noble person amongst them stole, they would forgive him and if a poor person amongst them stole, they would inflict Allah’s legal punishment on him? By Allah, if Fatima Binti Muhammad stole, I would cut off her hands” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari* Vol. 4, Hadith No. 681).

In another tradition, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari quoted Prophet saying that Allah told him:

“O my servants, I have forbidden oppression for myself and I forbid it between you as well, so do not oppress each other” (*Al-Tirmidhi* Hadith No. 2495).

Prophet mentioned about the ideal of social justice on the eve of his farewell sermon during Hajj. The excerpted part reads as:

“All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every other Muslim and that Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves.” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1623, 1626, 6361).

Prophet thus, reiterated his unequivocal stand about the already much emphasized tenet of social justice. It was a magna carta of Prophetic justice. Sayyid Qutb<sup>11</sup> in his commentary on Quran said that Prophet has set the examples throughout life, for rest of believers in putting justice and equality to practice. The criteria to join the company of Prophet were piety and truthfulness. Prophet had a compassionate attitude towards poor who had, however lofty character, which did not go well some *Quraysh*<sup>12</sup> leaders, who considered them as worthless. In fact, some of the leaders set a condition before Prophet stating that if poor slaves were ignored, they would accept Islam (Rahman 2000)<sup>13</sup>. Taking a moral high ground, during his stay at Medina, Muslims were asked by Prophet to treat fairly the *Quraysh*, who had previously oppressed them and prevented them from worship. This was quite unprecedented in a society where people believed in revenge and fought endlessly for it. Thus, Prophet’s model of social justice was all inclusive and could deliver results across religious affiliations. Many non-Muslims would repose their trust in Prophet and prefer bringing their disputes before him for resolution.

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<sup>9</sup> Banu Makhzoom was one of the influential and richest tribes in Mecca.

<sup>10</sup> Ummah is an Arabic word meaning supra-national community with common history.

<sup>11</sup> Sayyid Qutb was an Egyptian author, educator, Islamic theorist, poet, and the leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s.

<sup>12</sup> Quraysh were a trade community of Arabs, who were custodians of Ka’aba and to which Prophet belonged.

<sup>13</sup> Unpublished PhD thesis entitled ‘*The Concept of Social Justice as found in Sayyid Qutb’s Fi Zilal Al Quran*’ at University of Edinburgh.

**Social Justice in Islam and Character Building:** Character generally refers to the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual. It is a state of soul which can be purified by means of ethical-religious knowledge, beliefs and practices (Omar, 2013). Some of the attributes of good character include truthfulness, honesty, goodwill, altruism etc. Character building is, therefore, an effort put in to strengthen or improve such attributes of a person. It is a lifelong process involving inculcating and practicing wisdom.

Character building was high on agenda of Prophet and should therefore guide the worldly journey of *Ummah* (Abdullah, 2014). Prophet's vision of social justice could not remain a reality for long in contemporary Muslim world due to reason that fair share of Muslims neglected the true teachings of Islam and went astray. Delivery of justice during Prophet's times and for some time thereafter was achieved because of the strong character of people who administered this system of justice. This character, after being allowed to get diluted over a period of time, had its impact on the delivery of justice. Since character as a variable, was at the center of this system; the meaning of word 'character' merits little elaboration. The word 'character' in Oxford dictionary means all the qualities that make the person, groups of people, places different from other. According to Imam Al-Ghazali<sup>14</sup> (1993), character or ethics is an established state (of the soul) from which actions proceed easily without any need for reflection and deliberation. The word character though a noun is however more about action and practice. In Quran, the term used for meaning of character is '*khuluq*'. In one of the verses of Quran, the term '*Khuluq*' appears as "And You (Muhammad) are on an exalted standard of character" (68:4). Prophet was awarded prophet hood not because he belonged to particular community but had proven track record of qualities like truthfulness, trustworthiness, gentleness etc. Such qualities were even acknowledged by the adversaries of Islam. God was thus; very particular with this variable and it was a part of broad philosophy behind sending Adam on earth, to which angels had otherwise, very humbly objected. Prophet further elaborated and said:

"Nothing is heavier on a scale than having the good character". (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 2002).

"I have only been sent to perfect moral character". (Musnad Ahmad, Hadith No. 8595).

Such character could be acquired and developed through constant training and practice (Mohd 2003). This training would continue throughout one's life, especially during formative years. This development of character would also depend on dealing with one's emotions and that of others (Abdullah 2012). A popular Kashmiri proverb loosely translates as "the greatest character is loftier than the highest heaven". The heart, mind and body should work in synergy for virtuous conduct as demanded by an exalted standard of character. Man has been given the freedom of intention and choice. This freedom would be one of the important variables of evaluation on the Day of Judgment and it is therefore

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<sup>14</sup> Al Ghazali was a prominent and influential Persian philosopher, theologian, jurist and mystic who practiced Sunni Islam.

imperative to use it in a sensible and just manner. Thus the need to cultivate virtues and create strong immune mechanisms against vices has become stronger than ever. Abu Ali Miskawayh (d.1030), noted Muslim philosopher, said that attainment of ethics (character) to cultivate virtues is a lifelong process. He introduced four cardinal virtues viz. courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice (Ansari 1964). Without having courage and wisdom; people cannot have real sense of justice. The Companions of Prophet and many of their successors had imbibed this sense of justice. They wore character on their sleeves and derived endless wisdom from *Hadith*. It was because of this character building approach, the system of justice administered by Companions who received instruction and training from the Prophet itself was worth emulating. However, with the passage of time, there began an era of complacency about this training and practice, resulting in character crisis. As a result, the ideal of social justice remained a mere rhetoric. It happened gradually with the decline in character of Muslims that the quality of justice delivery started deteriorating.

**Character Crisis in Muslim World:** Character crisis in Muslim world is essentially cumulative result of corrupt mindset that gradually developed among individuals over a period of time. Companions of Prophet would waste no time in effecting what they heard of Quran or *Hadith* and exhibited deep sense of urgency in this regard. This made their lives meaningful and exemplary. There is a need to reinvigorate such sense of urgency amongst Muslims at individual level. There has to be an engineered attempt with regard to attempting positive change in mindset, for which the involvement of Islamic scholars, social scientists and religious leaders is to be sought. This may be a difficult but not an impossible feat to achieve. Mosque, which happens to be the religious center of Muslims, can be employed as a platform in this regard.

The countries of Muslim world during their transition to statehood did not focus on the tenet of character building or at least, it did not remain the priority. The dismemberment of Caliphate resulted into political chaos thereby adding to problem. Had it been otherwise, many problems facing the member countries of Muslim world could have been avoided because it was not merely dismemberment of territory but also of history, culture, and heritage. Muslims would have never fought sectarian wars, spied against one another, played into hands of anti-Muslim regimes, hurt each other's businesses; had they acquired the kind of character as stated in Quran and later demonstrated by Prophet and his companions. This resulted in chaos and led to trust deficit, which in turn created disunity amongst the Muslims. There is an urgent need to initiate reconciliation process among member countries of Muslim world.

Islam as a system of life comprised of certain subsystems, run by individuals with strong value systems. These individuals ran the various subsystems of Islam quite satisfactorily, delivering justice based on merit and reason. However, the constituent countries of Muslim world after assuming nationhood ignored the glorious past and played into the hands of erstwhile imperialistic countries for achieving some political and economic concessions. Without carrying out any needs assessment, they blindly replicated the ideas of democracy, free market, and personal liberty from the west. This is not to say that anything and everything coming from West is harmful, but replicating mindlessly their models would certainly not work and it did not work for the Muslim world either. Besides,



customizing these models as per people's needs, there is a need to ensure that they don't come in conflict with the well-established value systems. In a mad race for economic growth and political survival in the modern world, Muslim world countries went to the extent of strengthening the agendas of rival countries against each other. The idea of Ummah started losing its unitary spirit.

Ibn Khaldun's theory of development offers an insightful understanding of character decline in Muslim world and the consequences thereof. According to him, as far as Islam is concerned, it is itself a victim rather than perpetrator of malaise amongst Muslims. In the otherwise ignorant societies characterized by internecine feuds, paucity of resources and harsh climate etcetera, it developed quite rapidly against all odds. It was Islam that activated all the variables in positive direction, contributing to moral and material uplift of Muslims, which later constituted a primary force behind rise or fall of society (Chapra 2008). Ibn Khaldun argued that the trigger mechanism of Muslim decline was political illegitimacy. It gave least importance to moral values, which were otherwise eternal to Islam. The reins of power did not remain in the hands of most upright and competent in the eyes of people as desired by Quran (49:13). There was no equitable distribution of public resources in accordance with *Shariah*, and free and fearless criticism of govt. policies. The poor and disadvantaged were in most cases not free to vote; as they wished and were poorly represented in the echelons of power (Besley and Burgess, 2003: 17).

A study was conducted to ascertain the adherence of 208 countries of world to Islamic principles of governance and rule of law; human rights and civil liberties; and international relations (Rehman & Askari: 2010). The results indicated that the self-declared Islamic countries have not adhered to Islamic principles by-and-large. If the countries belonging to OIC<sup>15</sup> are compared with OECD<sup>16</sup> countries, there are wide disparities. OECD countries have visibly performed better. Islamic countries do not even fare better in comparison to non-OECD i.e., middle income countries. The results of the survey have important lessons for Muslim world. If the OECD countries have ranked higher for their adherence to Islamic principles that indicates Islamic principles not only promote civil liberties and human rights; better and just governance and substantial contribution to International relations but are for strict compliance to such variables. Thus the Islamic law makes governments duty bound to provide good governance, uphold civil liberties and political rights and foster better international relations with the global community. However, in spite of this, OIC countries have failed to patronize such principles. Another study conducted vis-à-vis the compliance of Islamic economic principles by various countries of world including Muslim countries threw some very interesting results (Rehman & Askari 2010). Based on compliance to Islamic economic principles, countries among top 30 were not members of OIC but belonged to OECD, which is a unique forum made up essentially (but not

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<sup>15</sup> The Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is an international organization found in 1969, consisting of 57 member states, with a collective population of over 1.8 billion as of 2015, with 53 countries having Muslim majority.

<sup>16</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is a unique forum made up essentially of thirty one most highly industrialized market democracies that produce around 60% of world's goods and services.

exclusively) of the 31 most highly industrialized market democracies that produce around 60% of world's goods and services. Amongst the countries belonging to OIC; Malaysia (ranked 33) and Kuwait (ranked 42) figured in top 50. Rest of the OIC countries slipped below rank 50 and even 100. Coincidentally Western and European non-Muslim countries find wisdom in applying Islamic economic principles and Muslim world failed to apply same, even though they were under obligation to do so. In other words, non-Muslims turned out to be more Islamic in their economic transactions compared to Muslims.

This character crisis among other things is also attributed to lack of proper attention given to the system of education. Muslim world failed to carry forward the rich traditions of scholarship that had existed previously. During times of Prophet, mosque used to be centre of learning and education. Later, separate *madrasas*<sup>17</sup> began to be established near mosques and the tradition continues till date in many places. It is pertinent to mention that at least 60 major centers of learning spanned the Islamic Empire from Baghdad and Isfahan in the East to Cordoba in the West that courted the wisest and influential leaders of human knowledge (Nakosteen 1964). This culture of learning needs to be revived and promoted as religious duty, as learning in Islam is considered as an act of prayers. The spirit of Quran is anticlassical and empirical method of knowledge has its roots in Quran (Iqbal 2015: 3). Decline in education is mainly attributed to closing the doors of *ijtihad*<sup>18</sup> and encouraging *taqlid*.<sup>19</sup> There has to be a renewed effort towards revitalizing the system of education on priority basis. It should be based on the assessment of inherent needs rather than blind borrowing from developed world.

**Character Crisis: Some Remedies:** Islam is “probably the most compelling spiritual and moral force on earth today” (Clark, 1997). As a powerful living reality in the Muslim world, it has the charisma to attract masses, unite them in spite of their great diversity and motivate them to act righteously in spite of centuries of degeneration (Etzioni 2004). Its strong stress on socio-economic justice, accountability of political authority, moral values and character building, combined with its strategy of education and dialogue for bringing a change, should prove to be a great blessing for Muslim world. It can help inculcate in the people a number of other desired qualities like honesty and integrity, conscientiousness, diligence, frugality, self-reliance and concern for rights and wellbeing of people. Such qualities in the long run pave the way for raising efficiency and equity.

Maximum stress therefore, needs to be given to the reform of human beings, who are main locomotive behind rise or fall of any civilization. They can help improve the development of their society if their character, upbringing and mental outlook are right. Raising the moral caliber will help to inculcate the qualities of honesty, integrity and conscientiousness. There is a need to revolutionize thought of Muslims in tune with

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<sup>17</sup> Madrasa is an Arabic word for any type of educational institution, whether religious or secular.

<sup>18</sup> Ijtihad as defined by Iqbal is “to exert with a view to form an independent judgment but not to be independent of Quran and tradition”.

<sup>19</sup> Taqlid is blind acceptance of dogmas, rituals and beliefs of other people.

Islamic injunctions. Reason cannot be the sole criteria to decide about the degree of goodness or badness. The logic of nothing being wrong, as long as it doesn't hurt the personal freedom of others is flawed. Moral prescriptions cannot be decided on individual basis but have to be socially recognized, which in turn would be dependent on religion and culture. It may, however, be difficult to raise moral caliber unless justice, dignity and self-respect are ensured for every individual in the society.

In a mad race to catch up with West and Europe, Muslims ended up in bulldozing resilient institutions. Colonization of Muslim world by West and Europe played an important role in it. Muslims attempted no independent understanding of West and Europe; based on their indigenous intellectual tradition. On the other hand, west also failed to study Islam through its primary sources and used secularized methodology. This added to the already existing misconceptions about Islam (Iqbal 2000). The responsibility of Muslims to produce scholarly works on Islam, based on its primary sources as Quran and Hadith and ensure its wide dissemination, has assumed urgency. Muslims look at their problems through the lens of others and end up working out faulty solutions. They read biased history written by colonizers which results in distorted comprehension of future problems. The popular historical narratives need to be deconstructed and if required, reviewed. This will dovetail a reasonable quantum of effort especially with regard to revision of educational resources. Muslims preferred to import alien economic models rather than creating indigenous ones. This served the economic interests of countries which exported these models (Ibid). There is a need to undertake research studies to understand the causes for continued decline of Islamic institutions and also explore possibilities for their revival. The institutions imported from elsewhere need to be examined for their relevance and efficacy. It would therefore be worthwhile to revive age old and time tested institutions of Islam such as *ijtihad*, *shura*, *dawah*, *ijma*<sup>20</sup>, *Zakat*, and *awqaf*<sup>21</sup> to make possible to have material advances accompanied by moral uplift, justice and social harmony which are important for providing the needed social and ethical capital for sustained development.

Education as an institution has a very strong potential for transforming Muslim mind. The knowledge transmitted via education will eventually determine kind of human beings that Muslim world produces (Arriffin 2017). However, it hasn't received much emphasis as is needed, in govt. budgets. In 2002 (IDB 2005: 13), the average adult literacy rate in Muslim world was 32%, which meant that around 426 million people in Muslim world were illiterate. All these countries together have only 600 universities while as US alone has 1975, or more than 3 times as many, when its population is less than one-fourth of Muslim world ([www.universitiesworldwide](http://www.universitiesworldwide)). After ensuring proper allocation for education in budgets, there is a need to ensure that people are being imparted education and not mere literacy skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Social justice should be one of the essential issues of Islamic Education System which must come up with ways and means required to achieve this ideal (Ramli, 2016). It should be supplemented by character education and the

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<sup>20</sup> Ijma is an Arabic term referring to the consensus or agreement of Muslim scholars on religious matters.

<sup>21</sup> Awqaf is a plural form of word waqf which means a voluntary, permanent and irrevocable commitment of one's wealth to Allah in cash or kind.

required modules should be incorporated within the mainstream curriculum of educational institutions. The systematic efforts towards creation of updated educational resources in this regard, have become imperative.

A kind of decline has emerged in Islamic intellectual space and the same can be gauged from the survey of related research publications. A huge quantum of scholarship available in Arabic language has become inaccessible owing to inability of about two thirds of contemporary Muslims to understand it. While learning of Arabic has become imperative, at the same time, projects of technically sound translations also need to be undertaken. The works to be translated should span across different genres such as theology, jurisprudence, sciences, humanities, social sciences etc with classics included. This will help in reducing the inferiority complex amongst Muslims who doubt the richness of their scholarly heritage (Iqbal 2003). Muslims need to undertake well designed research studies to understand the causes of their decline which would serve a good beginning for the reconstruction process.

Muslim society needs to be more open in terms of its ability to learn from experiences of people, regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity. There is a need to encourage critical thinking and creative pursuits amongst people involved in knowledge production and knowledge dissemination. Faculty of reasoning and questioning needs to be revived. Muhammad Iqbal argued that one of the factors behind the decline of *Ummah* is the closure of *ijtihad* which in turn contributed to academic decline. It also led to stagnation in thought and practice. He further argued that with the closure of *ijtihad*, fanaticism to juridical as well as theological schools of thought became widespread (Iqbal 2015). People not well versed with Islam, owing to lack of mandatory education, have started dominating the discourse of religion, thereby adding to confusion. Consequently, character building which was an important agenda of Islam became the casualty.

Priesthood has caused irreparable damage to the unity among Muslims and provided a fuel for growing sectarianism in Islam. A careful analysis of the situation will reveal that newer sects are creation of priests, who encourage personality worship and keep people confined to some issues of jurisprudence. Riding on an assumption that they are the only suitable people to interpret Quran and Hadith, priests have dangerously come up with flawed commentaries, without paying any heed to the science of interpretation and exegesis. The dangerously flawed interpretation of Quran especially is doing more harm. Priesthood as an institution would have worked only, if it had trained people in knowledge and character using 'learning by doing' approach, based on Quran and tradition. There is a need to infuse more and more scholarship into this institution of Islam. It remained confined to vested interests for the sake of power and prestige. Time has come to fix some mandatory qualification for people engaged in teaching and propagation of Islam.

The tendency of Muslims to blindly attribute everything to destiny, without properly understanding the relationship between cause and effect, and its importance in the transactions of day to day life, has badly affected their progress. Western civilization has emerged successful especially in science, technology and industry because of their commitment to reason and logic; it would therefore be worthwhile to actually understand

how to replicate their success and move ahead. There is no harm in adopting the best systems and practices from West and Europe, however, the strong emphasis on the values of Islam needs to be retained (Dien 2007).

In the postmodern world, Muslim identity seems to be at stake. With recent devilish political posturing of United States against Palestine, Muslim countries need to be calculated about their relationships with the western world. Economic interests should always be subservient to political interests which determine the very existence of community. Muslim world cannot afford to close eyes towards these glaring realities and 'myself first' attitude needs to be given up in the interest of *Ummah*. There is a need to rediscover the individual, collective and global identity through self-evaluation and knowledge of actual, not through retreat into past, through synthetic integration rather than simple transfer of knowledge, through active selective learning and sharing rather than nostalgic passivity and proud alienation (Ihsanoglu 2003).

Muslims need to re-imagine their identity and politics that is essentially based on justice. Violence as an instrument of politics by fringe elements should be strongly discouraged. As religious community besides having interfaith dialogues, they need to talk to each other, using existing religious spaces. There is a need to do away with sectarian jealousy and theological divisions besides initiating an uninterrupted and unintermittible dialogue among themselves. There is a need to encourage unconditional dialogue with non Muslims in order to do away with the misconceptions prevalent amongst them. Politics as an institution in Islam can then be an alternative to the existing systems of governance which essentially have capitalistic intent and are devoid of guarantees about social and human development.

Denying justice to people and expecting them to have character would never happen. People run the risk of getting dehumanized, due to prolonged oppression being inflicted upon them. It would be dangerous to deny them the sense of stake in progress and development of society. The yardstick for determining character of people fighting for survival in conflict hit militarized zones cannot be same as those living in developed countries. It would therefore be naive to subscribe to any contested definition of character in this regard. The US war in Iraq offers a very interesting example in this regard. David Miller in his book argued that the American & the British governments knowingly deceived their publics about the Iraqi issue and mainstream media helped these governments in their campaigns of propaganda and deceit (Miller 2004). The United States ended up destroying Iraq without getting United Nations Security Council approval, and failed to produce any substantial evidence of the presence of weapons of mass destruction, which had been alleged at the time of attack. Now, US in the guise of acting big brother of world cannot fix standards of morality and character in Iraq or for that matter for the rest of world. The member countries of Muslim world need to ensure that they don't end up repeating such kinds of scenarios while preaching justice.

Muslim world needs to consider and attempt recreating the idea of *Ummah* once again. The emergence of European Union after World War II offers a very good analogy this regard. This will obviously be a gradual process but thinking on these lines would be very

important. The geography of Muslim world has natural unity in this regard. The process of reunification can begin with economic integration followed by social integration, which can finally pave the way for political integration. This can begin through initiation of free trade on the pattern of EU having tax free regimes and preferential trade agreements. There can be programs for people to people contacts. Education and employment can be the areas of intervention in this regard. Saudi Arabia which is central sanctified place for all the Muslims can help in amplifying this process. Essentially, the social systems of Muslims have also unitary spirit, based on the injunctions of Qur'an and Hadith. Following economic and social integration, the contours of political integration can be identified and worked upon. The already established OIC can coordinate the activities and provide all kind of support in this regard. There can be no strict blueprint with regard to the entire process however, it will evolve as and when the modalities are finalized and carried out.

**Conclusion:** Prophet's model of social justice was practice based. The class of people required to administer this system of justice needed to have a very strong character in terms of commitment to truth, impartiality, and service of mankind. It has been due to constant decline in the degree of such qualities amongst people that such ideals of social justice could not be achieved. There is thus an obvious need to understand and initiate the character building process. A thorough and consistent self-reflection can help in identification of grey areas. All this would need a serious attempt at soul searching, soul cleansing and self-introspection. This could begin by imparting right kind of education based on requirements of seekers and teachings of Islam. There is no scope for complacency and a need to work with renewed commitment towards reconstruction of promising future is inevitable. The opportunities to achieve Prophetic ideals of social justice need to be identified and worked upon. The time for trust building and reform of justice delivery systems among the members of Muslim world is now with no scope of procrastination. The Muslim scholars from different fields of life such as Islam, Science and Technology, Philosophy, Politics and Society can be engaged to identify the contours of process. The variables in this regard need to be identified and activated. Political class will have to rise above petty considerations and facilitate the entire reform process. This may ultimately pave the way for progressive renaissance of Muslim world.

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