

BALANCING BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND
MORAL IMPERATIVES:
A PATH TOWARDS HUMAN PROGRESS
AND SURVIVAL

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the concept of basic human rights, emphasizing their foundation in both biological and intellectual needs. It argues that fundamental human rights stem from essential needs like food, water, and rest, while also highlighting the significance of higher intellectual capabilities that distinguish humans from animals. The article explores the importance of communication, free thought, and expression, essential for human development and societal progress, while acknowledging the challenges posed by political and social systems that restrict these freedoms. Through historical examples and philosophical insights, it critiques the suppression of free thinkers, drawing on the works of Iqbal and other thinkers to assert the necessity of morality in exercising these rights. The article also discusses the deterioration of moral and spiritual values in modern society, advocating for a balanced approach that integrates science, religion, and morality. Ultimately, the author proposes that only a comprehensive system, like Islam, which combines moral, spiritual, and scientific development, can remedy the destructive tendencies of contemporary civilization and lead humanity towards a just, humane future.

According to Essentialism at first sight existence seems to impart being to things. But in actual fact existence is an existence of something. What a thing is matters even more than the fact of being.

I

It is not easy to write on the 'Basic Human Rights', but it is still more difficult to implement them in a human society. In my view, the basic rights of man stem, in the first place, from his basic needs, namely, his organic needs like hunger, thirst, respiratory needs, elimination requirements, the sex motive, the needs for activity and for rest. These are biological needs of man required for the maintenance of the very life of an individual. Even the cave man required food, water, company (temporary or more or less permanent), and even he had to take rest after activity. Even Allah says in *The Holy Quran* that He has created night for the rest and day for work and activity. ¹ These basic requirements must be met in order that the organism should survive for further work and activity; these are the fundamental preconditions for survival and continuance. Thus, every human individual must enjoy the basic rights to nourishment, to drinkable water, to company and an opportunity for fulfilling his sex needs, fresh unpolluted air to breathe in, and an ample opportunity for activity and rest so that he can develop his body and muscles and to save them from atrophy. Both activity and rest are among the basic needs of his life besides food and water.

In the modern times, Explosive Growth of Population has deprived most of the human beings even of these basic organic needs. As the growth of population is getting out of control in most of the countries, we are falling short, sometimes dangerously, of the basic needs like food, drinking water, medication, etc., as in those countries where there is obtaining the condition of famine, e. g., some African states like Ethiopia where 14 children are dying daily due to drought. This situation is leading to a sense of insecurity resulting in the high rate of crimes, suicides, and an alarming growing tendency to drug-addiction; and man is gravely falling a prey to some very deadly physical and mental maladies like cancer, AIDS, liver problems, tuberculosis, etc. as well as insanity, mental disorders, depression, and juvenile delinquency and many other

mental ailments. The modern man is mentally afflicted, and is suffering from anxiety, insomnia, and is highly distracted and discontented. It is a pity that the Holy Prophet (P. B. U. H.) strongly forbade charging money for surplus water,² but we, unfortunately, are purchasing water for ourselves and for our cattle, and this situation has divested man from Allah's blessings.

II

However, these are the physical needs which man shares with all the living organisms, especially the animal world. Man differs from animals in that he does not want to live but to live a better and fuller life. Allah has bestowed on man the capacity to have higher intellectual powers which enable him to have a language and ability to formulate concepts. This is the main distinguishing feature which determines the superiority of man to all other creatures, including angels. One can read the relevant verses of *The Quran* in the chapter "COW" ("Baqara") in which Allah, while announcing the advent of man, asks the angels to name things which they could not as they were not given knowledge thereof. Then He asked Adam to name them which he could on which Allah commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam.³ Accordingly to Allama Iqbal, and very rightly so, "The point of these verses is that man is endowed with the faculty of naming things, that is to say, forming concepts of them",⁴ and forming concepts of them is capturing them. As *The Quran* says, Adam's one folly has placed man in such an environment where he is called upon to exert his physical and mental faculties in order to comprehend his situation in this life and to master it for his own benefit: this is the lesson of the Conquest of Nature (*Taskhira Kainaat*)⁵ which is one of the immediate purposes of his life. All sciences and philosophies are the result of the exercise of the higher mental faculties of man. This need has dragged man out of his solitude and has compelled him to go into communication' with his fellowmen. Aristotle has rightly described man as a social animal also⁶: he wants to live in a community and has an urge to communicate with others. Karl Jaspers, a contemporary thinker, has emphasized that man has the "absolute will to communication"⁷. He rightly says, 'Having its source in the solitude of self-communication, the search for truth pushes toward communication with others'.⁸ Communication, in fact, has become a necessary condition for better and fuller life. It is through mutual communication that all arts, sciences, philosophies, and, in short, culture flourish. This necessitates man's right for Freedom of thought and expression, but for which no

intellectual pursuit and development would have been possible. But, unfortunately, ways and means have since times immemorial been devised to check and curb the freedom of thought and expression in the name of national and international safeguards. What was the reason behind the Court administering a cup of hemlock to the great Socrates;⁹ why was Bruno done away with;¹⁰ and why the Inquisition forced Galileo to recant his findings which were experimentally demonstrable?¹¹ Many a people have either lost their lives or have been forced to recant their positions as a result of search for truth or disseminating it. The question arises was it in the interest of the society or for any danger to the ruling junta? Today more sophisticated methods have been devised to stop the tongue or pen of the “free thinkers” who can jeopardize, not the skein of the social set-up (at least Socrates could not be convicted for that), but the very existence of the rulers who have been self-centred as is obvious from the various scams which are cropping up in almost all the countries of the world today. This proves that the ruling class is not so much concerned about the survival of the society as about the prolongation of their own governance, however wicked and incompetent they may have been. Rather the more incompetent they are, the more cruel and harsh on the free-thinkers. Only those speakers and writers are patronized who produce ‘eulogies’ for their masters and their colleagues, including their policies; no criticism regarding them is going to be tolerated by the people in command anywhere in the world.

Free thinking, in this connection, is to be distinguished from ‘mischievous and destructive’¹² thinking as may be sometimes thought; it, on the contrary, means constructive thinking which is within moral bounds. Some people oppose free thinking on the ground that it may lead to moral and social depravity and destruction; but this will be, properly speaking, demonic and abominable thinking, which is good neither for the society nor yet for mankind. Iqbal has beautifully said in *Derb-i-Kaleem*:

Free thought leads to destruction of those who have
No sense of right and healthy thinking;
If thinking is raw and immature, then it
Transforms man to a beast pure and simple. ¹³

Thus, free thinking has to be within the bounds of morality and social norms. Socrates rightly said that to be a good man one should be a good citizen, and he declined to violate the law of his land in order to save his life though he was provided a chance to flee from the prison and country twice. ¹⁴ He preferred to die rather

than violate the law of his land. Herein lies the true spirit of free thinking which I am advocating in this short paper. Any human activity, which is divorced from morality, is diabolical. As we will see in the sequel, all departments of human life must be bracketed by moral injunctions but for which it renders man devilish; he ceases to be a human being who is naturally a moral agent. Free thinking and expression only within moral jackets is capable of doing any good to the agent himself and to the mankind in general. What Iqbal has pointed out in the above couplet is that only those are capable of free thinking who are well-versed in morality and always think within the moral limits, else they are devoid of mature and healthy thinking and whatever they conceive will play havoc with humanity at large.

Many other rights follow as corollaries from the Right to Freedom of Thought and Expression: e. g., the Right to Education; the Right to a share in the Control of the Conditions of Life;¹⁵ the Right to a share in the Cultural Heritage of the Race,¹⁶ including Art and Literature; Right to adopt a Religion and to Worship accordingly. If a person enjoys the Right to Freedom of Thought and Expression, then he also enjoys a Right to the type of Education he chooses for himself, the Religion he has adopted, and a Right to Culture, Art and Literature which he selects for himself. He also has a Right to Love and to have a Home, which stem from the Right to live a Better and Fuller Life, which also includes his Right to Health which is of immense importance for better life and for effective continued activity.

III

Another Human Right, which stems neither from the basic Organic needs nor yet from the Right to Free Thought and Expression, is the Right to Protection but for which the very elongation of life of an individual shall be in jeopardy. The human situation is replete with amicable as well as inimical factors. The former are used by man for his own benefits, while the latter are to be averted lest the life of an organism should be cut short. Each individual faces a variety of dangers to which he makes either of the two types of responses: (i) the Escape Response and (ii) the Combat Response. Man has to save himself from inimical factors like harmful animals and poisonous shrubs, etc., to prolong his life; and, above all, he has to evade attacks from his fellowmen (maybe in his own society or from some extraneous group). This necessitated producing some type of tools and armaments toward off internal as well as external assaults. In short, man has a right to

safety and amicable law and order situation to be ensured by the society. The cave man used to look after his own protection and he used simple, crude tools, the modern man has to look to his government for ensuring protection in exchange for taxes he pays to the government. The modern society is highly complicated, and where it provides for the needs of an individual falling within its jurisdiction, it has to provide for the law and order situation also which includes his personal safety as well. This justifies defensive measures only which are required for the continuance of life of an individual and that of the social set-up in which he lives. But, unfortunately, the modern man has grown highly ambitious and greedy which has played the main havoc with the modern world. The world today has become “*Overpoliticized*.” The modern world is an excessively political world and modern man is a political creature. This political involvement did not do much harm so long as it worked in unison with religion and morality. The real problem arose when politics was divorced from religion and morality in the West. This separation between politics and morality was initiated by the bloodshed caused by the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings¹⁷ in Europe. The only remedy the West could find was divesting politics more or less completely of religion, which ultimately led to the disappearance of morality from the political scene. Commenting on this situation, Iqbal has very rightly said in *Baal-i-Jibriil*:

‘Be it glory of kingship or a show of democracy
If divorced from religion, politics results in barbarism.’¹⁸

The result of this irreligious approach to the world problems is that the so-called modern civilization has led humanity to depravity, moral degradation, inhumanity and barbarity, which we are experiencing in the world today. As Iqbal has acutely remarked in the *Derb-i-Kaleem*:

‘Rise of civilization is the fall of chastity
Nations are playing havoc in the world;
Every wolf is in search of an innocent kid!’¹⁹

With the destitution of religion and morality, the Nietzschean prediction is coming to be true - it is becoming a stark reality, because with all the values gone to the winds, man is today living for *POWER*²⁰, which is the only value left for him to pursue. Man’s greed and selfishness, his hunger for wealth and riches, his him to Capitalism has forced devise ways and means to destroy his fellowmen, but to save their property and wealth in order to grab them. This is obvious from his devising sophisticated weapons, first

atomic bomb, which could work vast destruction; then hydrogen bomb which is still more destructive, and now the chemical warfare and nerve gas the sole purpose whereof is to devastate human beings, while their belongings remain unhurt and intact: This is nothing but transgressing all bounds (*'musrifeen'*²¹) as *The Holy Quran* says. Thus, the Right for Self-defense has been worst outraged: what was prompting for protection of oneself has been transformed into the worst kind of offensive and aggression. The just- concluded 20th century has witnessed two World Wars beside many devastating battles, wars, etc., and the ensuing 21st century is not promising anything better with the World facing such critical problems as Palestine,²² Kashmir,²³ Chechnya,²⁴ and above all, the US. attacking Iraq with the help of Allies, and under the cover of the U. N.²⁵ I am afraid this international body may meet the same fate which the League of Nations²⁶ met in thirties under almost kindred situation. Kindly let me warn that when World Powers become greedy and selfish, all World organizations, as they become their handmaids, are bound to see their fall, and this, unfortunately, appears to be written on the wall, especially when the sobs and sighs of helpless women and children are involved in it. This situation is the result of separating politics from religion and morality which the West is very proud of having accomplished. It has divested man of all love, sympathy and fraternity in short, it has dried "the milk of human kindness", to use a popular Shakespearean phrase.²⁷ It has rendered man callous, stone-hearted, and nothing beyond a money-monger, the result being that it has become very easy for man to slaughter thousands of fellowmen without the slightest prick or compunction. But what is the remedy for all that, if any?

Only such a system can retrieve the above situation which is complete in all respects; which has a complete moral code to meet the modern requirements; which lays stress on the importance of knowledge, including perceptual and intuitive knowledge; and a comprehensive metaphysical system which can raise man above his mundane requirements into a realm which can satisfy his psychological and spiritual needs. . Such a complete system is afforded by Islam at least: *The Quran*, for one, emphasized the need for the study of nature and natural phenomena, laid stress on the importance of sense organs as the gifts of Allah,²⁸ which had been condemned by the predeceasing philosophical systems, including Greco-Roman philosophy in which the Western philosophy originated. It has given a complete moral code, the only which can save humanity from its so-called free-mixing of man and woman,

its abominable sex-freedom which is leading it nowhere but to brutality and animality.²⁹ Unfortunately, the West is legalizing all sorts of sexual aberrations and perversions in the name of freedom, and only a sane person who has a clear foresight can see where it is leading man to; only the business morality is left which is no more than a segment of total morality which man needs for the retention of humanity which makes man a human being in the real sense. Moreover, the over-rationalism and excessive empiricism are mainly responsible for the “death” of religion and morality in the West, and this has led to a one-sided and exclusive development of science, for the modern world is fond of using scientific method in each and every branch of knowledge, including philosophy which has been balancing the excesses of science uptil now. This one-sided approach has rendered the modern man merely a brute and a greedy “dog” who is out to devastate everybody who can rival him in the acquisition of wealth and property.

What is the main ailment of the present situation? What is the remedy for it? The remedy lies, as said before, in a system which can bring about an amalgamation of science and morality (including religion), of reason and intuition, of Power and Vision. As Iqbal has very acutely remarked: ‘Vision without power does bring moral elevation but cannot give a lasting culture. Power without vision tends to become destructive and inhuman. Both must combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity’.³⁰ Thus, both science and morality are one-sided and inadequate, each by itself. As said before, any system or approach which marks a separation between politics and religion, between science and morality, between reason and intuition, as the West has done quite proudly, is bound to lead to devastation, cruelty and inhumanity. Is there any system which can combine these supposed opposites? Yes, such a system, which can accomplish all these requirements, is Islam As Iqbal has pointed out, ‘Islam is a single unanalysable reality which is one or the other as your point of view varies’.³¹ ‘In Islam’, says he, ‘the spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains, In Islam it is the same reality which appears as Church looked at from one point of view and State from another.’³² What is important in Islam is that ‘All is holy ground. As the Prophet so beautifully puts it: “The whole of this earth is a mosque.”’ The state according to Islam is only an effort to realize the spiritual in a human organization.³³ Only such an organic and comprehensive point of view can save humanity from the present perilous situation which, if not properly and timely handled, shall lead to complete annihilation of humanity from the face of the earth. Iqbal regrets

that both East and West are one-sided, the former relying mainly on 'passion' while for the latter 'doth reason furnish all *Accoutrement* of life.³⁴ He concludes in the *Javed-Namah*:

. . . Love-led
Can reason claim the Lord and reason-lit
Love strikes firm roots. When integrated,
These two draw the pattern of a different world.
Let love and reason intermixed be
To chart a world all new. . . .³⁵

I do not agree with Bertrand Russell who writes, 'Intelligence, it might be said, has caused our troubles; but it is not unintelligence that will cure them. Only more and wiser intelligence can make a happier world'.³⁶ What is required is combining intuition with reason, for it is the former which can rectify the ills caused by excessive reason and science. As Iqbal has rightly diagnosed, God has bestowed on man two sources of knowledge, i. e., intuition and senses, and using only one of these sources is Satanic. Those who have read and understood Iqbal properly know that he has very strongly emphasized the need for a unison of these two sources of knowledge, which are by no means antagonistic as is generally thought, and without this amalgamation no remedy for the prevalent situation is possible. I beg to quote here a beautiful Persian verse from his *mathnavi Gulshane Ra'ze Jadeed*,

If he should close one eye, it would be sin:
I t is by seeing with both eyes that he can gain
The path. . . .³⁷

And that Path is the path of humanity, fraternity, justice and love, alongwith scientific advancements a combination which has been promised by Islam. It is a proper understanding of *The Quran* and its teachings which can render man a human being on the one hand, and his scientific achievements which can extol him as the Master of the World on the other. Unless we combine the two, the moral as well as scientific progress, the humanity is bound to head towards barbarity, animality and utter devastation. The globe will present the scene of frenzied dance of the ancient berbers. Thus, morality is an indispensable constituent for living a human life on this earth, and it is our misfortune that we are ignoring the important lessons of morality, the result being that we are fast loosing human kindness, love and justice which are the three pillars of true human life-- perhaps we have already lost them and we are facing nothing but imminent complete extermination of mankind.

Notes and References

- ¹ Yusuf Ali A, *The Holy Quran*, (Eng. Tr & Commentary). (Lahore Sh. Ashraf, 1936), 78:10-11
- ² *Sunan Abu Daud*, Eng. Tr. by Ahmad Hasan, (Lahore: Sh. Ashraf, 1984), Vol. II, p. 990
- ³ *The Holy Quran*, 11:30-34.
- ⁴ Iqbal M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (Lahore M. Ashraf, 1978), p. 13.
- ⁵ *The Holy Quran*, 16:12; 31:19.
- ⁶ Thilly F. & Wood L., *A History of Philosophy*, (Allahabad, Central Book Dept., 1958). p. 117.
- ⁷ Schilpp Paul, A., (ed.) *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, (N. Y., Tudor Co., 1957), p. 211.
- ⁸ Ibid
- ⁹ Ibid, Thilly F. & Wood L., Socrates ‘was condemned by his own people, on false charges of atheism and corrupting the youth, to drink the poison hemlock (399) B. C.), p. 63
- ¹⁰ Ibid, Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was imprisoned by the Inquisition in 1592 Refusing to renounce his convictions, he was burned at the stake (1600) in Rome after an imprisonment of seven years, p. 271.
- ¹¹ Ibid, Italian astronomer and physicist (1564-1641): ‘Galilio was forced to recant the Copernican theory in 1933, and remained under the surveillance of the Inquisition until his death in 1641’, p. 270.
- ¹² The so-called free-thinking which is meant for sabotaging the whole social system and to destroy order prevailing in the world.
- ¹³ (Lahore: Ahsan Bros., 1st pub. 1936 & loth impression 1959), p. 74.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., Thilly F., & Wood L.
- ¹⁵ Titus H. H., *Ethics For Today*, (N. Y., American Book Co., 1957), p. 218.
- ¹⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁷ Divine Right of Kings was very strongly advocated by Sir Robert Filmer, who was knighted by Charles 1. In his Patriarcha he pleaded ‘that originally God bestowed the kingly plower upon Adam, from whom it descended to his heirs, and ultimately reached the various monarchs of modern times (Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, NY, Simon & Schuster, 1964) This led to a severe conflict between the church and the state till 1688 when supremacy of the Parliament was finally established, which finished the Divine Right of Kings This resulted in a complete bifurcation of the Church and the State, religion and politics
- ¹⁸ (Lahore Sh. Ghulamali, 1st pub. 1935 & 21st impression 1976), p. 40.
- ¹⁹ Op. cit. *Derb-i-Kaleem*, p. 147.
- ²⁰ See Frederick Nietzsche’s Thus Spake Zarathustra & Beyond Good and Evil
- ²¹ See *The Holy Quran*, and the Transgressors will be Companions of the Fire! 40 43 The Quran abounds in such verses.
- ²² Palestine is a centuries old problem. As Iqbal has said, ‘In the light of the history of Israel, Palestine ceased to be a Jewish problem long before the entry of Caliph Umar into Jerusalem more than 1300 years ago. Their dispersion, as Professor Hockings has pointed out, was perfectly voluntary and their scriptures were for the most part written outside Palestine. Cf. S. A. Vahid, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, (Lahore. M. Ashraf, 1964, Rep. 1973), p. 369f. Of late, Palestine was under the Turkish Ottoman Empire and in 1917 it was

taken over by the British who promised for home-rule by both the Jews and the Arabs. After the end of the World War II. Britain handed over the Palestine problem to the United Nations. The UN. General Assembly passed a resolution for the partition of Palestine on Nov. 29, 1947. Thus, the state of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948. The Jews have forcefully occupied a big Arab territory which led to three wars. Like India, Israel has been going back on her commitments and the Arab-Israel enmity has become one of the global explosive issues.

- ²³ Since the 14th century, Kashmir had been under the rule of the Muslims. In 1819, Ranjit Singh conquered it from the Afghans, which in turn was conquered by the British in 1846. The British sold Kashmir to Gulab Singh for Rs. 75 lacs and the State came under the Dogra rule. However, the Kashmir problem assumed a new dimension with the creation of Pakistan. It resulted in the battle between India and Pakistan in 1948 when U. N. O. enforced cease-fire. It was decided that the problem would be solved according to the U. N. Resolutions on the 13th of August, 1948 & the 5th of January, 1949 passed by the Security Council which stressed a need for plebiscite in Kashmir. However, India went back on her promises, the result being two Wars between the two countries in 1965 and 1971, and the threat of still more wars is permanently hanging over the two countries. The World pressure is for talks between the two countries, but no decision can be final which does not have the approval of Kashmiris, who are the real architects of the fate of their homeland.
- ²⁴ Chechnians embraced Islam during the 16th century under the influence of the Muslims of Dagestan. They waged a long war against the Czarist Russia. Their struggle continued from 1634 to 1859. The Chechnians put up 50 years of valiant resistance. It was in 1924 that Chechnya was made part of the Russian Empire. This, however, could not quell rebellions against the Communist Russia. They rather alleged to have helped the Germans during the World War II and as a result the entire population of the Republic was expelled to the Central Asia and Siberia during the reign of Stalin. As many as 10 million Muslims were killed during the banishing process. After Stalin died, they were repatriated to the mainland. In September 1991, the government Chechno-Ingushetia supported the hard-liners and in October, USSR Air-Force General Ozhokhar Dudayev became leader of Chechno-Ingushetia, he became the President of Chechnya and declared her independence. Since then Chechnya has been subjected to severest and cruelest attacks by Russia and a fierce civil war is raging in the region. Chechnya is striving for independence like some of the other Central Asian States which have broken loose from the Soviet Union and are now living as independent States, e. g., Ukraine, Uzbekistan, etc. Russian government is using utmost force to suppress them and keep them in their own fold. The Russian troops are perpetrating inhuman war crimes against the Chechnian Muslims.
- ²⁵ 1990 War in which U. S. attacked Iraq and forced U. N. to impose highly strict, rather cruel, sanctions as a result whereof thousands of Iraqi children have died for lack of food and proper nutrition.
- ²⁶ League of Nations was an international body predeceasing the U. N. O.
- ²⁷ Shakespeare's famous phrase used in his great play Hamlet.
- ²⁸ *The Holy Quran*, 32:9,
- ²⁹ Some of the Western countries have legalized gay marriages, homosexuality, and there is every possibility that other countries will follow suit.
- ³⁰ Op. Cit., *The Reconstruction*, p. 154

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid, p. 155.

³⁴ Ahmad S. Mahmud, *The Pilgrimage of Eternity*, an Eng. Tr. Of Iqbal's Javid-Nama, (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1961), p. 54.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Why I Am Not A Christian*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), p. 178.

³⁷ Hussain M. Hadi, (Eng. Tr.) as *The New Rose Garden of Mystery and The Book Of Slaves*, (Lahore: M. Ashraf, 1969), p. 8.

