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## **The Islamic Concept of Justice and Its Role in Establishing Social Peace: A Contextual Analysis for Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Justice occupies a central and foundational position in the Islamic worldview, functioning not merely as a legal principle but as a comprehensive ethical, social, and spiritual imperative. Rooted in divine revelation and prophetic tradition, Islamic justice (‘adl) encompasses fairness, equity, balance, and the protection of rights for all members of society. In the contemporary context of Pakistan—a nation grappling with multifaceted challenges including economic disparity, institutional inefficiencies, and social fragmentation—the Islamic framework of justice offers a potent, indigenous paradigm for fostering social peace and national cohesion. This article explores the theological and jurisprudential foundations of justice in Islam, examines its historical manifestations in early Muslim societies, and critically analyzes its relevance and applicability to Pakistan’s socio-political landscape. By integrating classical Islamic thought with contemporary governance challenges, the study argues that a sincere and systematic implementation of Islamic justice can serve as a catalyst for sustainable peace, equitable development, and moral regeneration in Pakistan. The article concludes with policy-oriented recommendations grounded in Islamic

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ethical principles, emphasizing institutional reform, educational transformation, and community-based justice mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Islamic Justice, Social Peace, ‘Adl, Pakistan, Sharia, Governance, Equity, Human Rights

## Introduction

Pakistan, since its inception in 1947, has aspired to embody the ideals of an Islamic welfare state, where justice, equality, and compassion form the bedrock of societal organization. The Objectives Resolution of 1949 explicitly affirmed that “sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to Allah Almighty alone,” and that the authority delegated to the state of Pakistan “shall be exercised within the limits prescribed by Him.”<sup>1</sup>

This foundational commitment underscores the centrality of divine justice in the nation’s constitutional and moral framework. Yet, despite this lofty vision, Pakistan continues to face persistent challenges in translating Islamic principles of justice into tangible social outcomes. Issues such as judicial backlog, corruption, gender-based discrimination, economic inequality, and ethnic tensions undermine social harmony and erode public trust in state institutions.

In this context, revisiting the Islamic concept of justice is not merely an academic exercise but a pressing national imperative. Islam offers a holistic and dynamic conception of justice that transcends narrow legalistic interpretations. The Qur’an repeatedly commands believers to “stand firmly for justice”, positioning justice as a divine attribute to be emulated by humans.<sup>2</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared, “The most beloved of people to Allah on the Day of Judgment and the closest to Him in rank are those who administer justice.”<sup>3</sup>

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This prophetic emphasis illustrates that justice is not only a societal necessity but a spiritual virtue.

This article contends that the Islamic concept of justice, when authentically understood and contextually applied, provides a robust framework for establishing social peace in Pakistan. Social peace, in this sense, is not the mere absence of conflict but the presence of conditions that enable human dignity, mutual respect, and equitable opportunity for all citizens. The study proceeds in four parts: first, it delineates the theological and jurisprudential foundations of justice in Islam; second, it examines historical precedents of justice in early Islamic societies; third, it analyzes the contemporary challenges to justice and social peace in Pakistan; and fourth, it proposes actionable strategies for integrating Islamic justice into national policy and practice.

### **I. Theological and Jurisprudential Foundations of Justice in Islam**

In Islamic thought, justice (‘adl) is both a divine attribute and a human obligation. The Qur’an describes Allah as “Al-‘Adl” (The Just), and His justice is absolute, impartial, and all-encompassing.<sup>4</sup>

Human beings, as vicegerents (khalifah) on earth, are entrusted with the responsibility of upholding justice in their personal conduct, social interactions, and governance. The Qur’anic injunction, “O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness”,<sup>5</sup> Establishes justice as a non-negotiable moral duty, even toward adversaries.

The concept of ‘adl in Islam is multidimensional. It includes procedural justice (ensuring fair processes), distributive justice (equitable allocation of resources), and restorative justice (repairing harm and reconciling relationships).<sup>6</sup>

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Unlike secular conceptions that often limit justice to legal formalism, Islamic justice integrates ethical, spiritual, and communal dimensions. It is inseparable from other core Islamic values such as compassion (rahmah), mercy (rahman), and trusteeship (amanah).

Classical Islamic jurists elaborated on these principles through the development of fiqh (jurisprudence) and siyasah shar‘iyyah (Islamic governance). Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), for instance, identified justice as the cornerstone of political legitimacy, arguing that a ruler’s primary duty is to establish justice among his subjects.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) emphasized that the purpose of Sharia is to secure the welfare (maslahah) of the people in this life and the hereafter, with justice being the means to achieve this end.<sup>8</sup>

The maqasid al-sharia (higher objectives of Islamic law), as systematized by scholars like Al-Shatibi (d. 1388), prioritize the protection of five essential interests: religion, life, intellect, progeny, and property—all of which require a just social order for their preservation.<sup>9</sup>

Crucially, Islamic justice is not static but context-sensitive. The principle of ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) allows for the reinterpretation of legal rulings in light of changing social conditions, provided they remain anchored in the Qur’an and Sunnah. This dynamism ensures that Islamic justice remains relevant across time and place, including in the complex realities of modern nation-states like Pakistan.

## **II. Historical Manifestations of Justice in Early Islamic Societies**

The early Islamic community under the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Khulafa al-Rashidun) provides compelling historical models of justice in action. Upon establishing the first Islamic polity in Medina, the Prophet drafted the Constitution of Medina, a pluralistic charter that

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guaranteed equal rights and protection to Muslims, Jews, and other communities.<sup>10</sup>

This document exemplifies the Islamic commitment to inclusive justice, recognizing the dignity and autonomy of diverse religious groups within a single political framework.

During the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab (r. 634–644 CE), justice was institutionalized through systematic reforms. Umar established the Diwan (public treasury) to ensure equitable distribution of resources, appointed independent judges (qadis) to adjudicate disputes impartially, and personally patrolled the streets at night to safeguard the welfare of citizens.<sup>11</sup>

His famous declaration—“If a dog dies of hunger on the banks of the Euphrates, Umar will be responsible for it”—captures the profound sense of accountability that characterized his rule.<sup>12</sup>

These historical precedents demonstrate that Islamic justice is not an abstract ideal but a practical governance strategy. It emphasizes transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, while prioritizing the needs of the vulnerable. The early Islamic state’s success in maintaining social cohesion across diverse ethnic and religious groups offers valuable lessons for contemporary pluralistic societies like Pakistan.

### **III. Contemporary Challenges to Justice and Social Peace in Pakistan**

Despite its Islamic identity, Pakistan faces significant obstacles in realizing the vision of a just society. The judiciary, though constitutionally independent, suffers from chronic delays, with over 2 million cases pending nationwide.<sup>13</sup>

This backlog denies citizens timely redress, breeding frustration and encouraging extrajudicial solutions such as tribal jirgas or vigilantism. While jirgas sometimes

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resolve disputes efficiently, they often violate constitutional rights—particularly those of women—and lack formal accountability mechanisms.<sup>14</sup>

Economic injustice further exacerbates social tensions. Pakistan's Gini coefficient—a measure of income inequality—stands at approximately 0.33, indicating moderate but persistent disparity.<sup>15</sup>

Rural populations, religious minorities, and women remain disproportionately marginalized in access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. This structural inequity fuels resentment and undermines national unity.

Moreover, the disconnect between Islamic ideals and state practice has led to a crisis of legitimacy. Many citizens perceive the legal system as elitist and alien, disconnected from their religious and cultural values. This perception is compounded by corruption, which the World Bank ranks as one of Pakistan's most severe governance challenges.<sup>16</sup>

When public officials enrich themselves at the expense of the common good, they violate the Islamic principle of amanah (trusteeship) and erode social trust.

Ethnic and linguistic diversity, while a source of national richness, also presents challenges to social peace when justice is perceived as unevenly distributed. Provinces like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have long alleged economic and political marginalization, leading to grievances that militant groups exploit.<sup>17</sup>

Addressing these perceptions requires not only equitable resource allocation but also inclusive political representation and cultural recognition.

Crucially, the failure to integrate Islamic ethics into public education has weakened the moral foundation of justice. Religious instruction in schools often emphasizes ritual over ethics, neglecting the Qur'anic emphasis on social responsibility and justice. As a result, younger generations may lack the ethical framework needed to challenge injustice in their communities.

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#### **IV. Integrating Islamic Justice into Pakistan's Socio-Political Framework**

To harness the transformative potential of Islamic justice for social peace, Pakistan must adopt a multi-pronged strategy that bridges theology, law, and public policy. This section outlines four key areas for reform: judicial modernization, economic equity, educational renewal, and community-based justice mechanisms.

##### **A. Judicial Reform Grounded in Maqasid al-Sharia**

Pakistan's judiciary must be reformed not only to enhance efficiency but also to align with the higher objectives of Sharia. This requires reducing case backlogs through digitization, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and specialized courts for commercial, family, and environmental matters.<sup>18</sup> Crucially, judges and lawyers should receive training in maqasid al-sharia to ensure that rulings prioritize human welfare and justice over rigid formalism.

The Federal Shariat Court (FSC), established under the 1973 Constitution, should be empowered to review laws not only for compliance with specific Qur'anic injunctions but also for their alignment with the broader spirit of justice and equity in Islam.<sup>19</sup>

For instance, laws that perpetuate gender discrimination or economic exploitation—even if not explicitly prohibited in scripture—should be scrutinized through the lens of *maslahah* (public interest) and *'adl*.

##### **B. Economic Justice through Islamic Welfare Principles**

Pakistan's economic policies must reflect Islamic principles of wealth circulation and social solidarity. The institution of *zakat*—mandatory almsgiving—should be revitalized as a tool for poverty alleviation and social cohesion. Currently, *zakat* collection is limited to a narrow set of assets and suffers from administrative inefficiencies.<sup>20</sup>

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A reformed zakat system, integrated with modern social welfare programs, could provide a safety net for the poor while fostering a culture of shared responsibility. Additionally, the state should promote interest-free banking and ethical finance in accordance with Islamic economic principles. Such measures would not only comply with religious injunctions against *riba* (usury) but also encourage productive investment and reduce debt-driven poverty.

### **C. Educational Transformation Emphasizing Ethical Justice**

The national curriculum must be revised to emphasize the ethical dimensions of Islam, particularly justice, compassion, and civic responsibility. Textbooks should highlight Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions that underscore social justice, alongside case studies from Islamic history and contemporary Pakistan. Teacher training programs should equip educators to facilitate critical discussions on justice, enabling students to apply Islamic ethics to real-world challenges.

Madrasas, which educate millions of Pakistani children, should be integrated into the national education framework, ensuring that their curricula include subjects like mathematics, science, and civic studies alongside religious instruction. This integration would produce graduates who are both religiously grounded and socially engaged.

### **D. Community-Based Justice and Reconciliation**

Formal legal systems alone cannot address all social conflicts. Pakistan should support community-based justice mechanisms that operate within constitutional and human rights frameworks. For example, village-level peace committees—comprising elders, religious leaders, and women—could mediate disputes using principles of *sulh* (reconciliation), a well-established Islamic practice.<sup>21</sup>

Such committees must be trained in constitutional rights and gender sensitivity to prevent the perpetuation of discriminatory norms.

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Interfaith dialogue initiatives, grounded in the Islamic principle of “knowing one another”, can also promote social peace. By fostering mutual understanding among Pakistan’s diverse religious communities, these initiatives can counter sectarian narratives and build a shared national identity.

## Conclusion

The Islamic concept of justice offers a profound and practical roadmap for establishing social peace in Pakistan. Far from being a relic of the past, it is a living tradition that speaks directly to the nation’s most pressing challenges. By grounding governance, economics, education, and community life in the principles of ‘adl, amanah, and rahmah, Pakistan can move closer to realizing its founding vision of an Islamic welfare state.

This endeavor requires political will, institutional innovation, and grassroots mobilization. It also demands a shift in public discourse—from viewing Islam as a source of division to recognizing it as a unifying force for justice and peace. As the Qur’an reminds us, “Indeed, Allah commands justice and good conduct and giving generously to relatives. He forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He advises you, perhaps you will be reminded” (Qur’an 16:90).<sup>22</sup> In heeding this divine counsel, Pakistan can forge a future where justice is not an aspiration but a lived reality for all its citizens.

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<sup>3</sup> Muhammad ibn Isa al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith no. 1327.

<sup>4</sup> Qur’an 6:115.

<sup>5</sup> Qur’an 5:8.

<sup>6</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Maqasid al-Shariah Made Simple* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2008), 23–25.

<sup>7</sup> Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Al-Iqtisad fi al-I’tiqad* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, 1969), 102.

<sup>8</sup> Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, *Al-Siyasah al-Shar’iyyah fi Islah al-Ra’i wa al-Ra’iyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1983), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Shariah*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1997), 8–12.

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- <sup>17</sup> International Crisis Group, *Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge*, Asia Report No. 164, March 2009, 8–10.
- <sup>18</sup> Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan, *National Judicial Policy 2022*, 7.
- <sup>19</sup> Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, Article 203D.
- <sup>20</sup> Government of Pakistan, *Zakat and Ushr Ordinance, 1980*, Sections 3–5.
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- <sup>22</sup> Qur’an 16:90.