

## Islamic View of Human Dignity

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### Absract

"Fascism" and "Nazism" ideologies, legal positivism and some other philosophical schools consider human beings without dignity inherently and search the origin of his dignity on matters such as his dependence to the state, government, race, belief and religion. But Islam gives inherent dignity to man qua man. The dignity is based on a series of moral and religious concepts and fundamental values, ie, "freedom, will and liberty", "power, intellection and contemplation" and "having divine breath and image". Islam, in addition to dignity, considers acquired dignity the most important criteria of which are piety and faith. This paper presents an analytical approach to analyze the concept and principles of inherent and acquired human dignity based on Islam.

**Keywords:** dignity, acquired dignity, fascism and Nazism, legal positivism, human rights.

### Introduction

One of the most important topics in the realm of law, philosophy, ethics and spirituality is "human dignity" because this is the foundation of many rights, privileges and human obligations. Human dignity is not only a right or a set of non-transferrable and deprivable rights but also considered as the basic human rights. Progress and sustainable development in any society depends on its observance. In case of ignorance and lack of commitment to the principles of its effects it losses values such as justice, freedom, equality and peace in the international and domestic relations. In this case, the world is full of cruelty, injustice, violence, war and discrimination which puts the ideal of "The formation of a unified international community" and "the establishment of the Islamic Republic" at risk. However, "fascism" and "Nazism" ideologies, legal positivism and some other philosophical schools consider human beings without dignity inherently and search the origin of his dignity on matters such as his dependence to the state, government, race, belief and religion. These ideologies deny any prior source of human rights. In contrast to these ideologies Islamic school considers inherent human dignity in addition to acquired human dignity and considers it as the basis for justice, freedom and peace in the world. The main question raised about human dignity is that why and based on what basis human being has inherent dignity? Is it possible to deprive him from this dignity? This aiming to answer this question examines the concept and principles of different forms of human dignity based on Islam and revelation teachings.

### The concept of human dignity

The word "dignity" has different meanings in the dictionary. The most important ones are worth, respect, magnanimity, , integrity, humanity, , rank, position, grade, status, prestige, being away

from impurity, charity and generosity. The English equivalent of the term “Keramat e Ensani” is "human dignity" which means the sense of honor, pride, respect, title, rank, privilege and honor. The Oxford Encyclopedia of the English defined the word "dignity" as: The word dignity (Dignity) is derived from the Latin word "Dignitas" which means the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect, A high rank or position, sense of pride in oneself; self-respect.

### **Types of human dignity**

Taking the literal meanings of human dignity into consideration, we find that dignity represent two entirely distinct characteristics of human beings. Some of these features show place, degree and location of people. In other words they present social, political, religious, and family status of people such as king and prince dignity and the dignity of the believer. This kind of dignity is the acquired or value oriented dignity which is acquirable or deprivable and may increase or decrease. But many of these features, such as humanity are inherent which are not either deprivable or assignable. This dignity which is known as “inherent dignity” does not accept any rank and degree. According to Islam human being has two types of dignity: inherent dignity and acquired dignity.

### **Inherent dignity**

Allama Muhammad Taqi Jafari while classifying human dignity into inherent dignity and acquired dignity believes:

In Islam, the two types of human dignity have proved to be, including: 1. the inherent dignity that human have it in their nature as long as they do not deprive themselves from it due to commit the crime against themselves and others. 2. The acquired and value oriented dignity which is created through unleashing the talents and positive forces of humans prowling the path of growth and perfection and charity. This dignity is acquirable and optional. The final and ultimate value of human being is in this type of dignity.

German philosopher, Immanuel Kant while theorizing “moral autonomy and inherent human independence” mentions: “human dignity is an honor and value shared equally among all human beings due to their inherent autonomy and their moral capability”. This type of dignity is inevitably related to “conscious human rationality” according to Kant. It seems that Kant's definition of human dignity, despite its importance, is not comprehensive because it does not encompass human beings who lack the necessary intellectual and moral ability. Therefore, inherent dignity can be defined as follows: “inherent dignity is the dignity equally and inherently shared among all human beings because of their inherent independence, moral capability and spiritual breath and image.”

The main reasons of inherent dignity according to Islam are:

A. Verse 70, Surah Al-Asra “We have honored the children of Adam and carried them on both land and sea. we have provided them with good things and greatly preferred them above much of our creation” This verse clearly proves that God has honored the sons of Adam.

B. The great Prophet (SAW) said: "There is nothing to God more honorable than human being. They asked: Even Angels? He replied: Yes, because angels are obliged like the sun and the moon but man is created free”.

C. The great Prophet (SAW) also said: “Once day the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions were sitting somewhere and some people carried the corpse of a Jew. He rose in his honor. He followed him and then sat. At this point, one of the companions said: Messenger of God, he was a Jew. He said: was he a man? Didn't share humanity? This is enough to respect him. Then he said: the infidels are equal with you Muslims and they have the same rights you have.

D) Hazrat Ali (AS) said to Malek Ashtar: Love human being deep in your heart. Do not be like a beast who does not hesitate to eat them; because they are two types: either your religious brothers or the same creatures even if they are not Muslims.” This Hadith means that human being is honorable and has dignity. In terms of social rights and citizenship, there is no difference between Muslims and non-Muslims. All of them are equal. Thus, he says “If you love every one deep heartedly, this is the same as where God says: “We have honored the children of adam and carried them on both land and sea. We have provided them with good things and greatly preferred them above much of our creation”

E) Mohammad bin Jafar Al –Aqbi reports that Amir al Momenin said: “O people! Hazrat Adam (AS) has not created slaves and all people are free. But God has entrusted the management and administration of some of you to others.” In this tradition in addition to the lack of originality of the story of slavery in Islam, the general human dignity with reference to liberation and freedom is confirmed.

And Prophet (PBUH) said: “All people are God lineage and their most beloved of God are the most useful ones in the lineage of God.”

Based on these reasons the verse “We have honored the children of Adam and carried them on both land and sea. We have provided them with good things and greatly preferred them above much of our creation” human dignity is inherent as long as the title of man and the Sons of Adam is true about him. It is clear that, as some scholars believe, this inherent dignity can not be imagined without the inherent rights because dignity is a kind of human aspect in terms of humanity and this meaning requires the human being to have inherent, natural and social rights such as the right to live, freedom of thought and expression and so on. Accordingly, there is no reason to consider social and citizen's rights due to have certain ideas. For when it is said “human being has inherent dignity”, the meaning of dignity is the constituent that predicates the subject, ie it is not possible to think of human being without it. In other words, inherent dignity is an honor and dignity that human beings possess due to their humanity. It has nothing to do with belief, race, religion and etc. It is a kind of dignity the human being is not deprived of even in case of committing a crime. Therefore, those verses of the Quran, including verse 12 of Surah Muhammad and verse 179 of Surah Araf that describe the disbelievers and other people as animals for lack of proper use of reasoning powers, thinking , hearing and vision, do not intend to deprive them from the inherent dignity. In fact, these verses show that these people have not put a step beyond the life of plants and animals in the process of evolution of life.

Most of these verses concern the coordination of their behavior with the purpose that God created human beings for. In fact, since the purpose of the creation of the world is human and human evolution, those who turn their back to this purpose are criticized.

These analogies are merely to show that these people have placed their divine self in the hands of their animal self (sensuality) and they are busy with sleep, food, anger and lust and unaware of human life. Clearly the animal self is opposed to human soul and the spirit of God otherwise the animal life has dignity and value. Are animals mean and worthless beings to be compared with such human beings? Are we allowed to say that as the animals are mean and worthless these human beings are deprived of their rights such as them?

In the logic of the Law:

Each entity in itself is blessed, because granting the existence alone shows the mercy of God to any creature; any possibility that becomes a fact is blessed by God’s mercy in any level of being.

### **Acquired dignity**

Acquired dignity is a type of dignity which is gained by using the innate talents and abilities in the path of growth and gaining moral virtues In other words:

Although everyone has equal dignity and respect, but man is capable of unleashing his talents to pass through perfection levels and promote to higher degrees. Thus, human behavior causes different ranks. As a result, people become superior to the other.

The most important criteria of this Acquired dignity is based on religious teachings, "piety and faith". Almighty Allah says in this regard in verse «13, AL-HUJRAAT» “people, we have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you might know one another. The noblest of you before Allah is the most righteous of you. Allah is the knower, the aware.” By focusing on this verse some points are obtained: First: Race, language, gender and liberty has nothing to do with human dignity. Second: This verse does not confine human dignity in value oriented dignity, because this verse indicates that all humans have dignity. But the noblest of people for God are the most righteous of them. Third: piety and faith based dignity can be the basis for human advantage in the Day of Judgment rather than this world, in other words “value based dignity has no effect on social rights. All humans regardless of their degree of faith have social rights.

God mentions in various verses including verse 126 Surah Baqarah says “and when Abraham said: 'my lord, make this country safe and provide its inhabitants whosoever of them believes in Allah and the last day with fruits. ' he said: 'and whosoever disbelieves, to him i shall give enjoyment for a while. then i shall compel him to the punishment of the fire, how evil an arrival” This verse indicates that God provides utilization of natural resources in the world to all people, regardless of their faith and belief. This rejects the idea of the superiority of the faithful people in use of natural rights in the world because in this verse when Abraham (pbuh) asks God to “make this country safe”, He answers: 'and whosoever disbelieves, to him i shall give enjoyment for a while. Then i shall compel him to the punishment of the fire, how evil an arrival”.

### **Principles of human dignity in Islam**

Dignity of Islam is not based on a contract and credit but rather it is described based on an ontological and original issue the origin and nature of which is human creation and it is justified on the basis of divine orders. In other words, inherent human dignity is based on a series of fundamental moral and religious concepts which are discussed below:

'I know what you do not know. 'One of the most important moral and religious foundations of inherent human dignity is “freedom, will and liberty” The independence and free will involve several concepts: First, the human being is an ultimate creature. In other words a significant portion of the autonomy is confined with human ultimate. This means that human being is the ultimate end of the world. He gives meaning to the Universe. All creatures obey him and they are to serve him. Kant says:

Even if the most common understanding ponders about all things and the world itself, it cannot hesitate to vote that all creatures in the world regardless of artistic greatness in their organization and spite of the diversity of their purposeful linkage, if the human being did not exist, they would be in vain, the whole creation was an empty and useless wilderness without an ultimate goal.

Second, the human being has the ability to inhibit his action and behavior. He can resist against what he wants. Another manifestation of independence is the legislative dignity of will. According to Kant, the human being is morally capable of acting in a way that his behavior becomes a general rule.

Freedom, will and liberty are emphasized by religious doctrines as one of the most important foundations of inherent human dignity. Focusing on the following hadith by the Prophet (pbuh) it is clearly observed that “freedom, will and liberty” are the basic ideology for human dignity. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said: "There is nothing to God more honorable than human being. They asked: Even Angels? He replied: Yes, because angels are obliged like the sun and the moon but man is created free”.

### **Power of contemplation**

The ability contemplate to determine what is morally right or wrong, is inherent in all humans. Human being with the help of innate wisdom is capable of thinking and making decisions to shape his own life and with making laws that structure human life, he helps to maintain and promote mutual respect among people.

The scholars when interpreting this verse “we have honored the children of adam and carried them on both land and sea. we have provided them with good things and greatly preferred them above much of our creation” (Israa: 70) have focused that “ this verse means that God has dignified the children of Adam through contemplation, speech, the ability to distinguish right and wrong, a beautiful face and wisdom of the world and the other world.

### **Having divine image and breath**

Based on the revelation based theory of dignity, the human dignity is not only because he has freedom, will and liberty but because he has divine breath and image; this means that God has created the human being like himself and “in fact human nature mirroring the Divine Names is connected to universe in terms of its.

The teachings of other religions including Judaism and Christianity focus on the existence of divine image for human being. Adherents of the revelation do not either place man against God or God against man, but they say He is a continuity and connection with man. This relationship and kinship explains ontological and metaphysical basis of human rights and human dignity in society and in a religious state: “This very useful relationship between God and man is used in the verse “and ran my created soul in him”.

### **Having God’s caliph (successor) aspect**

This dignity is because man is God's caliph. The God's caliphate statues is not something that can be denied by acts such as corruption and bloodshed. These are formal affairs, and they do not ruin the God's caliphate statues because when God talks to the angels about placing human being as God's caliphate on the earth “when your lord said to the angels: 'i am placing on the earth a caliph, ' they replied: 'will you put there who corrupts and sheds blood,” He answers: “I know what you do not know.” God's answer reveals that the caliphate status is not voided by acts such as corruption and bloodshed. “In fact, what is to blame, is not the existence of the human being; but it is the act and behavior and his act is separate from his existence”. Therefore God has place human being as his caliphate because of inborn talent for understanding the truths and mysteries of the universe. In other words, teaching secrets and truths of existence to the human at the beginning of creation has led man to achieve this state which is higher than the state of the angels.

Based on what have been discussed about human dignity based on Islam, it can be concluded that, firstly, human is an embodiment of God and mirrors the existence of God. Destroying and crushing every person breaks the mirror and prevents the reflection of the divine light. Secondly, human dignity is something inherent and it is not related to human acts and behaviors. Thirdly, revelation

based dignity is more comprehensive and complete in explaining human dignity than other theories because according to this theory the inherent human dignity exists due to his freedom, will, liberty, contemplation and divine image and breath.

Of course, in many international documents on human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the social, economic and cultural rights (1966) inherent human dignity is defined in terms of these bases i.e. freedom, will, liberty and contemplation and it is identified for all members of the human family as the basis for freedom, justice and peace in the world. In the introduction of these documents it is written that the mentioned right (human rights) results from the inherent dignity of the human being. Therefore relying on the inherent autonomy, personality and moral conscience of man in justifying human dignity in the international system of human rights is something that links the religions with human rights ideals and provides convergence between the original teachings and human dignity. As mentioned before, the idea of revelation based dignity is superior to other views due to universality of defining and justifying the inherent human dignity and arising rights.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the concept and theory of human dignity and considering religious teachings regarding human dignity in the divine religions, especially Islam, we can say: Firstly, inherent human dignity is a type of dignity shared equally among all human beings due to their ability to contemplate, freedom, free will and divine image. This dignity is something inherent which is non-separable and abstracted from man and it is impossible to think of human being without it. Human dignity is inherent and the man is entitled to the natural rights as long as the title of man and the Sons of Adam is true about him. Secondly, it is a kind of dignity the human being is not deprived of even in case of committing a crime against oneself or others. In fact, what is reprehensible is the current behavior of a man rather than his essence. A man's act is separate from his nature. Therefore, those verses of the Quran that describe the disbelievers and other people as animals for lack of proper use of reasoning powers, thinking, hearing and vision, do not intend to deprive them from the inherent dignity. Thirdly, the idea of fascism, Nazism and legal positivism, in addition to their incompatibility with traditional religious teachings, are in conflict with rational criteria for the dignity. Fourthly, the approach that bounds human dignity to crime commitment suffers from a sort of paradox. Fifth, respecting inherent human dignity requires respect for human independence will free and contemptibility. They can be confined in exceptional cases, to maintain public order, morality and respect for the rights and freedoms of others within the rule of law and fair trial.

### **Notes**

- 1- In the introduction to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (form of government in Islam), "forming unit international nation" through the development of international relations and cooperation with other Islamic movements and people is envisaged as one of the main objectives of the Constitution.
- 2- In the sixth paragraph of Article II of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran "the dignity and value of man," is considered as one of the ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic.
- 3- Based on the idea of fascism, the value of the human is in his or her dependence on government and public service, which has dominance over his or her life and death. This is the government who has granted public freedoms to individuals. Therefore he could easily deny the

freedoms of individuals. Fascist idea is an anti human idea which observes no dignity and value for human being. In this thinking, human rights are absolute nonsense ideas. Nazi ideology considers human values in a specific breed and believes a person serves the community and race that possess his destiny. This ideology classifies human beings into perfect, semi perfect, imperfect and mean in terms of their race. Legal positivism approach denies any "source of a priori" for human rights and argues that all powers originate from the ones that government or government officials determine.

4- Seyed Mohammad Hashemi, human rights and fundamental freedoms, p. 148; M. Mohammad Rasekh, right and interest, p. 49; Shastak J. Jerome, "Theory of Human Rights" translated by Javad Kargozari, legal justice, Sh40, 144 p.

5- Ali Akbar Dehkhoda Dictionary p. 16070 .

6- Henry Campbell, Black, s Law Dictionery, p.456.

7- Dignity.

8- Oxford English Encyclopeida, p.398.

9- Mohammad Taqi Jafari, universal human rights in Islam and the West, p. 279 .

10- Immanuel Kant, Gruandwork of the Metaphysic, tr. with in trod, HJ Pato, p.96\_97.

11- Ali-bin- Hesamoddin Mottaghi, Konz ol ommal, p. 192 .

12- Mohammad Baqer Majlesi, Bihar al-Anwar, p. 273 .

13- Ali-bin- Hesamoddin Mottaghi, ibid, P. 192 .

14- Nhjalblagh, p. 428

15- Mohammad Taqi Jafari, ibid, Pp. 282-283 .

16- Ibid., P. 291 .

17- Hossein Ali Montazeri, rights Mission Page 37 .

18- Rahim Nobahar, "religion and human dignity", in: Theoretical Foundations of Human Rights (Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Human Rights), S613632.

19- Seyed Reza Feyz, mystical principles of human dignity, S439447 .

20- Seyed Mohammad Hashemi, ibid., P. 101 .

21- Hossein Ali Montazeri, ibid., P. 37 .

22- (Baqarah: 126 ).

23- Autonomy.

24- Manuchehr Sanei Darreh Bid, the role of man in the thought of Kant, Page 82 .

25- Roger Sullivan, Kant's moral philosophy, Ezatollah Fouladvand's translation, p. 45

26- Ali-bin- Hesamoddin Mottaghi, ibid., P. 192 .

27- Roger Sullivan, ibid, p. 45 .

28- Fakhroddin Tarihi, Majma ol Bahrain, Seyyed Ahmad Al-Husseini, 152 .

29- Mohi al ddin Arabi, Fusûs Hakam, S151152 .

30- Michael Fishbin "picture of human and people's rights in the Jewish tradition", tr. H. Soleimani, in: H. Soleimani, criminal justice in Judaism, p. 173; M. Hashemi, ibid., P. 96 .

31- Mohammad Taqi Jafari ibid., P. 280 .

32- Seyyed Hashem Aghajari, "the religious rule , human dignity", Mosharekat newspaper, the 19th of Khordad 17, 1378, p. 7 .

33- Mohi al ddin Arabi, ibid., P. 167 .

34- Naser Makarem Shirazi et al., Instance Interpretation vol. 1, pp. 176 and 178 .

35- Novak, Michael, «Human dignity, Human Rights,» November 1999. P. 39- 48

36- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted on 16 December 1966  
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