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Mohammed Hashim Ali Sajid
Ph.D Scholar, Maulana Azad
University, Jodhpur,
Rajasthan, India

Islamic perspectives on good governance: A comprehensive analysis

Mohammed Hashim Ali Sajid

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Abstract

This paper explores the principles of good governance through an Islamic perspective and underlines their importance in the current political discourse. Emphasizing justice, accountability, and transparency within the context of Islamic governance, the directives are found from the Qur'an and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), where leadership is looked at as a strong godly responsibility dedicated towards public welfare. Two such exemplars of exemplary case studies are the two reigns, namely of Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab and Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz. These two cases demonstrate how such ideals were translated into the administrative practice of governance and, at the same time, underscore the significance of social equality, public accountability, and community engagement for modern governance frameworks. Through an analysis of the congruence of Islamic and modern governance models, this study focuses on the integrability of ethical dimensions into leadership, further repeating the prescription that effective governance is fundamentally about justice and the improved welfare of citizens. Lastly, the findings illustrate the extent to which Islamic precepts remain relevant in addressing modern issues of governance.

Keywords: Islamic governance, good governance, Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, justice, accountability, transparency, social welfare, public responsibility, historical perspective

Introduction

Good governance, invariably, has been unanimously accepted as a crucial component of social development, and human beings in every country yearn for open accountable leadership to achieve peace and prosperity. In contemporary terms, the term good governance has emerged as the new yardstick by which political system is measured, but the notion of good governance is not new; it is a hallmark of Islam guidance for over 1400 years. It is based on the bases of justice, responsibility, and accountability through which it brings a broad framework emphasizing human welfare as a divine responsibility in the light of Islamic governance.

The types of governance as practiced under early caliphs like Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) and Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) reflect those in modern governance models. Their rule was focused on fair distribution of resources, taking into consideration social welfare and justice for all people, regardless of social class or religion. This historical trend set by these caliphs clearly indicates that the concepts of equity, public accountability, and transparent decision-making can be compatible with Islamic governance and have relevance for today's world.

In this research, a comprehensive analysis of good governance from an Islamic perspective would be undertaken by looking into the central principles derived and settled from Islamic teachings and how they were put into practice during the golden periods of two prominent caliphs' terms. The hope is that by using these historical examples, this research will shed light on the possible insight of Islamic governance and how it can effectively complement the governance of today.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on governance, hence addresses key questions of congruence between the Islamic and modern governance models, and the practical implications of the principles involved.

Corresponding Author:
Mohammed Hashim Ali Sajid
Ph.D Scholar, Maulana Azad
University, Jodhpur,
Rajasthan, India

This research shall examine how teachings on public welfare and accountability both before the Creator and before the people make the Islamic model timeless and still relevant in addressing the overall contemporary challenges of governance issues.

Islamic Concept of Governance

The teaching of the Quran and practices of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, form the backbone of Islamic governance. This assures a comprehensive framework that brings together spiritual, ethical, and administrative principles for guidance in the governance of leaders according to the commandments of God. In contrast, the models of secular governance only consider issues of accountability to Allah and the community, where a ruler must be accountable for the physical, moral, and spiritual development of the people.

Definitions and Terminologies

There are two most important words in Islam's system of governance: 'Khalifa' and 'Khilafat'. Khalifa means "successor" and is the head of the Muslim Ummah or community, who leads the rule of life according to Islam and strictly aims at justice. Khilafat or Caliphate represents the state with both politico and religious authority under the Caliph.

In the period of the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs' ('Al-Khulafa Ar-Rashidun'), those very words described leaders as temporal and spiritual caretakers of the people and considered themselves to be the trustees of Allah's law.

Fundamentals of Islamic Administration

Justice (Adl)

The two principled cornerstones of Islamic governance are justice, 'Adl. The Qur'an explains the imperative of justice clearly: "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice" (Qur'an, 4:58). Islamic justice is then much more than legal fairness, but also includes economic and social equity. Caliphs, specially Umar ibn Al-Khattab, embodied this by making sure the rights of those at the marginalized end were respected.

Accountability (Hesab)

Accountability ('Hesab') is an essential element of Islamic government. The rulers are considered as God's trustees, and they are fully conscious that they shall be called upon to render accounts for their deeds. The Qur'an strongly emphasizes individual accountability: "Every soul, for what it has earned, will be retained" (Qur'an, 74:38). The public consultation by the first caliphs ('Shura'), the freedom given to citizens to express their grievances, made them more accountable towards the people.

Transparency and Consultation (Shura)

Transparency and consultation is salient characteristics of governance under Islam. The Quran also instructs the leaders to consult one another: "And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves." (Quran, 42:38). Caliphs, especially Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) followed open governance through obtaining public input and extending transparency to avoid corruption.

Governance Role in Elimination of Public Welfare

Governance in Islam is perceived as a service to people. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized this role by saying, "Each one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock." Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) focused on public welfare with provisions for poor and orphans through 'Baitul Mal' or public treasury. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) who followed this legacy, talked about social equity, abolished unjust taxes, and treated all citizens equally.

Historical Background of Islamic Governance

The historical background of Islamic governance lies very deep within the administration of the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs' or ('Al-Khulafa Ar-Rashidun') who assumed power shortly after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) left the world in 632 CE. These caliphs reaffirmed justice and moral governance while providing a foundation for an Islamic political system wherein the people were promised their welfare to be safeguarded. Two most notable examples are Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab and Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz. Analyzing his rule, the two calendars reflect Islamic governance practices. This chapter illuminates the governance system in each period during their respective reigns of the two caliphs concerning justice, public welfare, and transparent administration.

Governance under the Rightly Guided Caliphs

The 'Rightly Guided Caliphs' established a system of governance reporting to the doctrines of justice, equality, and accountability in accordance with Islamic ideology. The first four caliphs— Abu Bakr (RA), Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA), Uthman ibn Affan (RA), and Ali ibn Abi Talib (RA)—established a model of governance which combined spiritual leadership with political power. Their claim to govern was founded upon their close relationship with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and their stringent adherence to 'Sharia,' or Islamic law, as the basis for rule.

The key characteristics of this model were as under

Consultation ('Shura'): Mutual consultation was taken into making decisions. Caliphs sought opinions through the consultation of companions and consultants with the involvement of governance in respect to the choice of the public.

Public Accountability: Caliphs are accessible for the direct address of public grievances and strengthens their accountability to the people.

Social Welfare Above the Rest: Caliphs paid an urgent attention to the well-being of the poor and oppressed and, therefore, public resources elevated the most vulnerable element of society.

Case Study 1: Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA)

Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) is regarded as the second most able and fairest leader in Islamic history. During his reign times in 634–644 CE, there occurred expansive development of the Muslim state while ensuring justice for people's welfare by him.

Justice and Responsibility

Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) was the epitome of justice in governance. He kept an example before himself and his

governors. He himself used to journey incognito so that he may observe the situation regarding his people. His saying, "If a mule stumbles on the banks of the Euphrates, I fear that Allah will ask me why I did not pave the way for it," betrays his feelings of responsibility.

Public Welfare and Social Reforms

Umar established a state treasury, commonly known as 'Baitul Mal', for the collection and distribution of wealth for the benefit of orphans, the poor, and the needy. He established old age pensions and provided social security to the widows through the state, thus ensuring that rights are accorded to the non-Muslim communities.

Administrative Reforms

Umar administered the empire into provinces, which were governed by trusted governors. He set checks and balances as he was taking an account of governors' assets in order to check corruption, thus establishing a model of service-oriented leadership.

Case Study 2: Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA)

Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) is also known as the "Fifth Rightly Guided Caliph" who ruled from 717 to 720 CE. During his period, his rule was generally regarded as a golden period in Islamic governance because he had implemented so much reform to bring about justice and equality.

Reformation of Governance and Redress of Grievances

Inheriting an empire full of injustice, Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) rushed to relieve the governorships of unjust governors and corrected many wrongs done by previous rulers, particularly in terms of unjust taxations and expropriation of property.

Economic and Social Reforms

Umar established economic justice, abolished oppressive taxes, and made sure that riches will fall proportionally. He put an end to adversities against converts to Islam thus achieving social tranquility and inculcating Islamic equality.

Asceticism and Justice

Umar lived a simple life, giving up any luxury status attached to the title of leadership. His modest and just nature made his rule become the benchmark for any future Islamic leader.

Governance Systems and Practice

The systems of governance under the caliphs were anchored on these fundamental principles of Islam:

Transparency: Their deeds were transparent, encouraging public participation in governance

Merit appointment: Governors were appointed based on merit and integrity, rather than political influence. Social Equity Caliphs focused on fair treatment of the vulnerable, such as non-Muslims.

Core Values and Practices of the Islamic Governance

Islamic governance is based on relevant values and principles as outlined in the Qur'an, the prophetic traditions

of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH, known as the Sunnah, and the practice of 'Al-Khulafa Ar-Rashidun', or the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs'. In this latter sense, they comprise elements of good, responsible, and just leadership; the leaders are entrusted with the people's trust and the commands of God. This chapter will present relevant values and practices that define early Islamic governance as applicable today.

Justice (Adl)

Justice (Adl) forms the basis of Islamic governance and has legal, economic, social, and political dimensions while giving every individual equal treatment. This verse in the Quran addresses people of faith to "be persistently standing firm in justice". Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) is known for his unwavering demand for justice; he was bound to dislodge corrupt governors. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) tried to scale-off injustice inflicted by earlier leaders by abolishing oppressive taxes and retrieving the rights of the weak.

Social Justice

Social justice was meted-out to all segments of the society even to non-Muslims. The 'Baitul Mal' or the public treasury fed orphans, the weak, and old persons ensuring that the needy received what they needed with the aid of social aid.

Legal Justice

No one is above the law in Islamic governance. The Sharia-based rule of law applies equally to ruler and subject. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) set precedent by insisting on being judged like any other citizen, reinforcing accountability.

Accountability - Hesab

Accountability ('Hesab') is a concept in Islamic governance wherein rulers are taken as custodian of Allah's trust. The Qur'an emphasizes personal responsibility: "Every soul, for what it has earned, will be retained" (Qur'an, 74:38).

Self Accountability

Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) remained a true embodiment of this self-accountability aspect where the leaders were guided to keep themselves responsible before judgment. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) took such practice of life when he considered his life as duty-oriented and ascetic.

Public Accountability

Public accountability was imperative with the caliphs being always accessible to the public. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) would go about and visit people in streets for their welfare and Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) encouraged direct interaction between the leaders and public.

Openness and Consultation (Shura)

Openness and consultation ('Shura') are vital elements of Islamic governance, as the Quran urges leaders to consult with others: "And those who have responded to their lord, whose affair is determined by consultation" (Qur'an, 42:38).

Shura

Both caliphs highly used 'Shura', embracing the view of different types, even the opponents' suggestions and which they used in their policies.

Citizens' Involvement in Government

Islamic governance involves public through citizen participation to treat citizens as partners Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) established an environment where citizens were free to ask the caliph about the activities he was performing.

Social Welfare (Maslaha)

The theory of 'Maslaha' or public welfare forms the backbone of Islamic governance. The administration is responsible for all citizens' welfare and provision of their fundamental requirements such as food, shelter, and health. Islamic governance advocates the allocation of equal share of resources. The 'Baitul Mal', the treasury or the exchequer, was a vital institution responsible for the re-allocation of Zakat gathered wealth and tax money for public service and to equalize the portions.

Protection for the Weak

Both caliphs took the welfare of the downtrodden into consideration and implemented policies for elderly citizens, widows and orphans, and rendered fair treatment to non-Muslims. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) did away with jiziya on the newly converted Muslims.

Economic Justice

Economic justice was included in the governance process within the Islamic way. Fair taxation, removing unlawful taxes, and ensuring that no person was allowed to be in poverty while other people enjoyed wealth were the concerns of the Caliphates. It was Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) who practiced the Fardh (obligation) land tax system, and Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz streamlined the process of taxation to render it as light as possible on the poor class.

Reforms of Governance and Innovations

The governance reforms undertaken by Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) and Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) significantly influenced the manner in which Islamic governance decided justice, accountability, and well-being of people. The reforms of both the caliphs are mainly based on how the governors should be appointed and monitored, economic justice, and welfare of society towards ensuring a just and equal society.

Both the caliphs had reformed the process of governance selection mainly on merit rather than personal relations. Selecting governors based on their competence and integrity, and rejecting those who sought power; maintaining accountability of governors by recording their wealth at the beginning and end of their tenure to prevent corruption. Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) dismissed unlawful officials, and allowed the citizens to bring cases directly before him as a sign of transparency.

Economically, both the caliphs gave paramount importance to just taxation and wealth redistribution. Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) developed Zakat so that wealth is distributed equally among the needy; he also brought a just land tax. Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) removed taxes not having any valid reason, such as 'Makas' trade tax, and also made sure that newly accepted Muslims are not liable to 'Jizyah'. This move did not allow the accumulation of wealth with the officials and promoted economic justice.

Social welfare was a significant part of their administration. Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) established the public treasury, 'Baitul Mal', which served the poor, orphans, and

widows. He also introduced pensions for elderly and disabled persons. Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) developed these schemes further by focusing on justice, which included the reversal of confiscated lands and patronizing public works, including roads and mosques.

Both of them focused on education and enlightenment and maintained schools while promoting the message of Islam. Both of them practiced social justice by equal treatment of their non-Muslim citizens while providing equal protection to them as well. Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) also included his abolition of unjust practices in favor of justice for all citizens.

The reforms, which started by Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) and then Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA), formed the basis of just governance by justice, accountability, and welfare. Their leadership is of inspiration so far as to understand what just and responsible governance would look like in the context of Islam or modern principles.

Comparative Analysis with Modern Governance

These two caliphs represent the tenets of Islamic leadership that are relevant even up to these modern forms of governance, such as justice, accountability, transparency, and social welfare. However, in bringing these principles into the context of this modern life, similarities and challenges have emerged.

Justice and Fairness

In Islamic government justice ('Adl) is a tenet of dealing with persons in a balanced manner and rendering them fair treatment. This concurs with the principles of the current democracies in the form of rights equalization and fairness in courts. On the other hand, while the Islamic government ensures divine justice, today's systems face troubles to implement secular justice in heterogeneous societies navigating varied cultural perspectives and striving for one kind of justice.

Accountability ('Hesab')

The Islamic theory of accountability ('Hesab') teaches that the rulers are to be held accountable in both this life and the hereafter. The contemporary governance system emphasizes accountability through democratic processes such as elections and checks and balances, but there is a variation in the effectiveness of each of these models. The Islamic models provide an equally strong ethical basis wherein moral considerations are automatically inculcated within the fulfilled responsibilities of leadership.

Transparency and Consultation (Shura)

Transparency and 'Shura' in the system of Islamic governance open up decision-making to make citizen participation a reality for democratic principles. But, bureaucratic inefficiencies often prevent sound public consultation. In the Islamic approach, consultation is not merely practiced but its leaders have a moral obligation to heed public voices.

Social Welfare (Maslaha)

The aim of the welfare of these people is socially prominent in Islamic governance, which has been identified as the 'Maslaha'. Though modern government has provisions under the safety nets, their actual impact generally proves to be very marginal. The system of Islamic governance widely

based on distributional equality helps in having significant insight into today's more contemporary social policies for excluded people.

Challenges and Lessons for Current Governance

The caliphate models of Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) and Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (RA) give good lessons for current governance but pose great challenges in the application of such principles in modern contexts. One challenge is the complexity of modern nation-states: diverse political systems, secular frameworks, and economic interests may have little basis in the ethical principles cited about early Islamic governance. Moreover, the size and diversity of populations today create logistical challenges to attain a level of personal accountability and justice that marked the caliphs' reigns.

In fact, despite these limitations, several lessons can be derived for contemporary governance. First, justice and accountability both are essential. Modern governments can adopt transparency and hold the leaders accountable for their actions, just as early caliphs used public consultation and supervision of officials to have the least attitude of corruption and fairness in public administration.

This is based on the idea put forward by the Muslim caliphs emphasizing social welfare or 'Maslaha'. The emphasis is on putting the needs of society first, those who should not be neglected or deprived. Political leaders today can thus be inspired by crafting policies that protect the welfare of the poor, making the available resources distribution fair, besides making sure social justice forms part of their economic planning.

Final but not the least, open consultation and transparency are relevant to contemporary governance, where now governmental decisions require more public participation. Contemporary leaders can establish trust and ensure more ethical and fair governance if they practice inclusive dialogue and the common good.

Although there are challenges in mimicking the first generation of Islamic governance models, their core values of justice, accountability, and social welfare remain lessons to be gleaned for contemporary ethical improvement in governance.

Conclusion

This study of the leadership by Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) and Caliph Umar ibn Abd al- Aziz (RA) throws light on an ageless model of key values and behaviors which foster justice, accountability, transparency, and social well-being. These are not only the bedrock of Islamic governance but also very close to modern governance values. The principles of Islamic governance, looking after all citizens, and making the leaders custodians of public trust, should be carefully understood by the political leadership in the modern scenario. Ethics and moral dimensions may intend to enrich the new systems with a culture of accountability and inclusion. Ultimately, the legacy of early Islamic governance stands as a powerful reminder that even in best of times, the wise leader never loses sight of justice and the common good-that is, what God wants-and public responsibility.

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