

## Balance for Better

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Islam believes in the growth and nourishment of the human heart, soul and mind. It emancipates and liberates the person. It gives him freedom of choice to direct his life. 'Slavery' deprives a person of freedom given to him by God. In de jure slavery, known as traditional slavery or chattel slavery or simply slavery is a system in which property laws are applied to people and people are bought and sold like commodities and used as labour force.

Slavery was a source of economic benefit and hence was widely practised in the world. There are heart wrenching accounts of many slaves especially those enslaved in the Americas in works of history and fiction especially the Atlantic slave trade. Britain has also been a part of it and cities such as Bristol, London and Liverpool grew rich off the trade.<sup>(i)</sup>

An article in *The Guardian* published in 2015 rightly points out that roots of racism in Europe may well be traced back to slavery and Colonialism<sup>(ii)</sup>.

At the time of the advent of Islam slavery legally existed in almost all countries. Islam had a twofold approach towards it. Firstly there were steps towards betterment of slaves and gradual emancipation, as freeing all slaves at once was not feasible because it would induce jobless, helpless and unprotected people into the wider society all at once. Secondly there were steps to abolish slavery altogether.

For their betterment Islam enjoins its followers to treat slaves with kindness as the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing of Allah be on him) taught his followers to treat slaves in a very kind and gentle manner by taking care of their food, clothing and work load<sup>(iii)</sup>. The base of these teachings being, as stated by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing of Allah be on him): "do you not know there is God above you Who has far greater power over you than you seem to have over your slave"<sup>(iv)</sup>.

Islam adapts several methods for the permanent emancipation of slaves; it not only considers freeing of a slave as an act of virtue (v), but also prescribes freeing of a slave (if possible) as an expiation of several offences.<sup>(vi)</sup>

Other mandatory methods for the emancipation of slaves include<sup>(vii)</sup>:

- Punishment for beating a slave is to set him free.
- If the slave is a relative of the master he is automatically set free.
- If a slave is owned by two people and one of them sets him free, he must pay the co-partner to earn complete freedom for the slave. If he cannot afford to do so, the slave must be set free to earn and pay the money.
- The slaves who had fled from Mecca were not given back to their masters so they could be saved from slavery and infidelity.
- If any person, at that time, entered into

matrimonial relationship with a female slave and she begot a child, she was set free.

Islam also provisions 'mukatabat' (deed of manumission, or contract of liberation)<sup>(vii)</sup> as per the will of the slaves and not their masters. So they may be set free and earn the money to pay back to their masters. This is clearly stated in the Holy Qur'an 24:34.

Today slavery is outlawed in all recognised countries of the world, but certain forms of slavery still exist in which a person is de facto forced to work against their own will. It includes human trafficking, debt bondage, unwilling domestic servants and forced

marriage. Trafficked humans are used for sexual slavery, forced labour, forced marriage etc. Islam gives a just economic system along with giving due rights to men and women according to their role in society hence leaving no room for slavery of any kind. The Islamic state, according to the Holy Qur'an, is instructed to spend money for the emancipation of slaves and debtors<sup>(ix)</sup>.

The purpose of our existence as described by the Holy Qur'an is to manifest God's attributes in ourselves. A person who is held under the custody of another person has a limited horizon of thought and action and Islam stands against this.

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## REFERENCES

- i [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/6185756.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6185756.stm)
- ii <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/08/european-racism-africa-slavery>
- iii Islam and Slavery by: Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad p. 7-11
- iv Islam and Slavery by: Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad p. 11
- v Al-Qur'an 90: 9-17
- vi Islam and Slavery by: Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad p. 13-15
- vii Islam and Slavery by: Hazrat Mirza Bashir Ahmad p. 15-18
- viii Al-Qur'an 24:34
- ix Al-Qur'an 9:60