

## THE QUR'ĀNIC CONCEPT OF HUMAN EQUALITY: AN ANALYSIS AGAINST RACISM AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

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### **Abstract:**

The research investigates both the Qur'ān's message about human equality and its potential to fight racism and ethnic discrimination in present-day societies. The research examines Islam's doctrinal foundation regarding equality by studying major Qur'ānic verses which stress universal human dignity and humanity's common ancestry. The research demonstrates Islam's anti-racism approach through an analysis of Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ's story and the Farewell Sermon alongside the Prophetic teachings. Current racial and ethnic issues demonstrate that secular approaches lack the appropriate means to address equality's ethical aspects. Current studies show racial and ethnic discrimination remains a problem in Muslim-majority communities, so the author recommends Qur'ān-focused religious education programs as the solution. According to the research, the Qur'ānic perspective of equality provides both a compelling alternative to racial discrimination and establishes foundational guidelines for Islamic activism against racism, which depend on Qur'ānic teachings.

**Keywords:** Anti-Racism, Human Dignity, Islamic Ethics, Qur'ānic Equality, Racial Justice, Theological Reduction.

### **Introduction**

Human equality remains a fundamental construct that recognizes moral and political thought through all historical civilizations. Discussions around human rights, anti-racism and social justice currently lead academic discussions and shape policy decisions across modern societies as nations face increasing ethnic conflicts, racial violence and discriminatory nationalism grows. Since these secular systems deliver a strong impact, they do not provide a solid foundational metaphysical basis for the spiritual and ethical prevention of prejudices. Islamic tradition reveals human equality through verses in the Qur'ān which establish universal equality by anchoring it in God's process of creation and human responsibility to answer for their deeds. The Qur'ānic text establishes a different narrative than modern racial hierarchy because it declares that all humans stem from one original source while they share inherent dignity (karāmah) and receive God's assessment through taqwā practice. This research examines the Qur'ānic belief about human equality across theological, ethical and sociopolitical aspects, and how it helps societies battle contemporary ethnic discrimination and racism. In both historical periods and current times, racism exists across multiple violent strategies along with systematic structures. The construction of racial hierarchies through history utilizes colonial practices of slavery and modern administrative racism with ethnic prejudice in

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politics for securing legitimacy in discrimination and subordination. The racial dynamics in communities targeting Black communities and indigenous populations alongside immigrant groups heavily impact how members experience their environment alongside legal enforcement systems, educational systems and employment prospects. Religious traditions push for enhanced social divisions by supporting exclusive interpretations of their texts while simultaneously creating theological models capable of releasing humans from oppressive systems. The Islamic tradition expresses a detailed model which appears in the Qur'ān. Esack explains that Islam “presents a discourse of human liberation that undermines every form of privilege except that of moral excellence”.<sup>1</sup>

The Qur'ān delivers its central announcement that all people share a single genetic origin. In Sūrat al-Nisā', God declares: “O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul (nafs wāḥidah) and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women...”.<sup>2</sup> The text underlines the Basic unity between all humans and our spiritual descent from one source. Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt declares that God's purpose in creating the world's various nations and tribes is to foster mutual acknowledgment between people rather than establish superiority claims, as it states: “O mankind, We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous (atqākum)”.<sup>3</sup> This verse eliminates all forms of ethnic or racial superiority by recognizing human differences through an individual's moral character rather than physical features. The interpretation finds strong backing in classical tafsīr works. According to Al-Ṭabarī's tafsir, God nullifies claims of pride through blood relationships or tribal heritage by establishing righteousness as the sole basis for superiority.<sup>4</sup> Al-Rāzī provides additional explanation of how racial pride functions as a deceptive Satanic ideal while divine favor flows from genuine God-consciousness, which remains unseen.<sup>5</sup> This moral criterion corresponds to the teaching delivered by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s Final Address, in which he stated, “There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor for a white over a black, except by taqwā”.<sup>6</sup>

During its founding period, Islam distinguished itself by accepting formerly enslaved individuals among its members and elevating non-Arab companions and women into its primary community rather than adhering to Greco-Roman acceptance of slavery or Enlightenment liberalism's exclusion of non-European groups from human status. The appointment of Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ as mu'adhdhin exemplified how Islam affirmed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s accessibility and spiritual duties were independent from one's race and social standing. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī to stop his insults about Bilāl's parentage since it showed his jāhiliyyah mindset.<sup>7</sup> Sunnah acting as a field practice demonstrates Islamic anti-racism principles, which the Qur'ān established. Even though Muslim communities have a clear doctrinal basis against racism, tribalism and ethnic

discrimination still persist throughout many modern Muslim societies. The cultural norms in South Asia and the Gulf suppress the Qur'ānic morality through caste division rules that influence marriage systems and by enforcing racial discrimination against migrant workers. A gap between Qur'ānic ethics and actual social behavior demonstrates the theological requirement. The successful redemption of Qur'ānic egalitarian principles requires both interpretive analysis of tafsīr and community-wide self-assessment and comprehensive institutional transformation. As Sayyid Qutb powerfully wrote, "Islam abolished all racial and class distinctions in the face of God... and this must be reasserted in the face of every cultural deviation".<sup>8</sup>

Recent Islamic scholarly exploration promotes the return of this social welfare framework. Khaled Abou El Fadl establishes that the Islamic moral worldview exists to defend justice combined with human dignity because those concepts completely oppose racial or ethnic discrimination.<sup>9</sup> In their work, Wadud and Yacoob analyze the Qur'ān while emphasizing embodied justice through racial and gender perspectives. The revival of ijtihād—the practice of independent reasoning—becomes essential to establish timeless truths as responses against ongoing injustices. The current research establishes its position amid present intellectual and ethical frameworks. This research examines essential Qur'ānic verses alongside classical exegesis while exploring Prophetic traditions and present-day interpretations to expose the Qur'ān's extensive message about human equality as we face modern racial and ethnic prejudice. The research adopts a theoretical method that relies heavily on Arabic textual analysis and genuine scholarship from authentic Islamic perspectives. This piece presents an examination of theological dimensions and ethical frameworks instead of conducting a sociological review. Through its authentic interpretation, the Qur'ān presents both spiritual guidance and social and ethical rules which provide deep resources to handle one of human history's most enduring societal problems.

### **Human Equality in the Qur'ān: Theological Foundations**

Human equality obtains its theological foundation in the Qur'ān through a threefold vision which exists beyond social differences based on race, ethnicity or political status. All people obtained their existence from God according to the Qur'ānic paradigm, which grants every person inherent dignity and demands moral responsibility without regard to social differences. Through divine creation, humanity shares a common spiritual lineage that rejects racial supremacy, tribal pride or ethnic discrimination. All people come from a single originary soul according to the Qur'ān's primary theological dogma. The single soul (nafs wāḥidah) stands as God's creative origin.<sup>10</sup> According to this basic Qur'ānic anthropological concept, the fundamental ethical principle of physical uniqueness binds all human diversity back to its original metaphysical unity. Through repeated verses, the

Qur'ān teaches that human beings serve as khalīfah (vicegerents) on Earth,<sup>11</sup> thus receiving moral duties without racial or tribal entitlements. All descendants of Adam share an exclusive honor as God gave it to them not only beyond Quraysh but also beyond Arabs and all human beings. In Sūrat al-Isrā', the Qur'ān proclaims: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam (wa laqad karramnā banī Ādam)".<sup>12</sup> According to this verse, humans receive dignity (karāmah) as a divine endowment that extends to every descendant of Adam without regard for belief or lineage or conduct. This establishes a divine declaration of universal human value. According to the interpretation of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, the term karāmah signifies "an elevation above others through moral excellence and divine endowment".<sup>13</sup> This belief operates outside racial and social boundaries because it represents God's divine grace toward humanity.

The Qur'ān redefines the reason for human diversity beyond tribalism (ʿaṣabiyyah), which dominated pre-Islamic Arabia by explaining God's purpose for social differences. In Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, God states: "O mankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the one most conscious of Him (inna akramakum 'inda Allāhi atqākum)".<sup>14</sup> The verse swiftly condemns ethnic pride because it offers a moral measurement system to replace human racial classifications, i.e., taqwā. Al-Qurṭubī comments that "the verse prohibits mutual boasting and calls instead for mutual recognition (taʿāruf) grounded in piety, not genealogy".<sup>15</sup> The Arab tribes frequently invoked lineage in order to establish authority, yet God sent this verse specifically to combat this approach. Theological interpretation reveals that differences point to God's manifestation, thus denying their capability to create separation between people. The Qur'ān presents this concept in Sūrat al-Rūm: "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variation in your languages and your colors (ikhtilāf al-alsinatikum wa alwānikum)".<sup>16</sup> Through divine revelation, racial and linguistic diversity moves beyond biology to gain the status of transcendent spiritual symbol. According to al-Ālūsī, the divine expression explains how all racial and linguistic differences were designed by God to harmonize with Creation, instead of being used as markers of segregation.<sup>17</sup> Islamic theology finds its founding principle in anti-racism because this Qur'ānic theological construct converts the biological distinction between humans into visible expressions of divine wisdom.

The Qur'ān rejects the notion that family lineage, social standing or financial wealth can create social hierarchies and ranks. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received a minor rebuke from God because he neglected to attend to the blind man Ibn Umm Maktūm when focusing on the elite of the Quraysh tribe.<sup>18</sup> The divine instruction selects genuine worship above rank and status affiliations. Through this message, God shows His acceptance of people whom society has rejected. Theological equality demonstrates important future implications for human existence. All human beings

face judgment on the Last Day through their actions, independent of their racial heritage or national origin. The Qur'ān states: "Every soul will be held accountable for what it earned".<sup>19</sup> The doctrine of rejecting racial advantage receives more extensive explanation through the collections of hadith traditions, such as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared in his Farewell Sermon: "All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a white have any superiority over a black, except by piety and good action".<sup>20</sup> The classical interpretation of the Qur'ān endorses the belief in religious equality. Al-Ṭabarī, while commenting on a Qur'ānic verse,<sup>21</sup> writes: "There is no cause for one people to think themselves better than others because of lineage, as all return to Adam and Eve. The true superiority lies in fearing God".<sup>22</sup> Al-Shawkānī demonstrates in his writing, this verse dismantles cultural vanity to establish one universal divine order.<sup>23</sup> The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) demonstrated this doctrine through his real-life conduct. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) appointed a former African slave, Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, as the official spokesperson to call people to prayer in Madinah alongside converts Suhayb al-Rūmī and Salmān al-Fārisī. God chooses no particular ethnicity since these decisions established divine theological principles that all ethnicities are equal before God.

The Qur'ān develops equality through ideas about creation and moral duty instead of the social contract principles that underpin Western liberalism. According to the Qur'ān's principles, believers must eliminate their self-importance while fighting external discriminatory behavior. From Islamic theology, racism constitutes a dual offense because it stands against divine wisdom for diversity and crosses the boundary that belongs only to God. As Ibn al-Jawzī warns, "He who boasts of his lineage resembles Iblīs, who claimed superiority over Adam based on his origin".<sup>24</sup> The comparison between racial arrogance and satanic pride endows racism with an extremely hazardous spiritual nature. The meaning that stands behind our religious text has diminished since our current social practices cover up its spiritual message. Discriminatory practices toward others based on ethnic, caste and color differences remain in practice among present-day Muslims. Modern anti-racist ethics need theological text reengagement by scholars who will contextualize them accordingly. The return of authentic Islamic teachings needs *ijtihād* along with *tajdīd* and, most importantly, the sustaining ethical integrity. The theological concept of human equality does not affect the current social and political realities when its foundations remain inaccessible to modern understanding.

### **Qur'ānic Anti-Racism and Prophetic Practice**

The Qur'ān teaches equality among people through its spiritual beliefs, but also fights racism through the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s actions. According to the Qur'ān, racial superiority had its basis removed while Islam built a system based on personal piety, which every individual could achieve regardless of

race or social class. During his time, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) employed his conduct to lead reforms and make choices that showed and established anti-racism as an essential practice for Muslims. The Qur'ānic condemnation of superior claims based on origin exists most profoundly through the creation story of Iblīs who denied Adam's submission because Iblīs held himself superior in substance: "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay".<sup>25</sup> Racism emerges as a theological form of arrogance which predates all metaphysical questions about substance. Through his analysis of Iblīs' behavior, Al-Rāzī points out that his arrogance displays *kibr* as a spiritual sickness that stands in direct opposition to *taqwā*.<sup>26</sup> According to Ibn Kathīr, both Iblīs and today's racists use the same reasoning to demonstrate their belief in racial and class superiority.<sup>27</sup> According to the Qur'ān, racism has equivalent moral standing to the devil, and this sin violates God's order and humanity's nature.

Through his prophetic message, Muhammad purposefully evolved to counter the immoral tribal practices. Before Islam took hold, Arabian culture was based on *ʿaṣabiyyah* (tribalism) through which racial and ancestral ties decided which roles people should hold in society. Islam's arrival dismantled this worldview. When Islam rose to prominence, Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ emerged as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s first pick for *mu'adhdhin* because he was an enslaved African individual before his conversion. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s decision served both functional and declarative purposes to fight against unfair ethnic discrimination. When Bilāl received an appointment to become the first *mu'adhdhin*, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared his holistic superiority to mockers who harbored ethnic beliefs while the Quraysh nobility confronted this open challenge.<sup>28</sup> During his Farewell Sermon during the last pilgrimage, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) officially declared anti-racism as fundamental to Islamic teachings: "O people, your Lord is one and your father is one. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab over an Arab, a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black over a white—except by piety".<sup>29</sup> The sermon stands as the most thorough religious declaration against racism because it appeared during an era of important religious law. Al-Shahrastānī notes in his commentary that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s statement dissolves ethnic rankings, then establishes moral conduct as the basis for all value consideration.<sup>30</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught these values and took action to protect them from violation. Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, among the Prophet's closest companions, became hostile toward Bilāl when he used derogatory language by calling him "O son of a black woman." The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received this disapproving comment harshly yet declared to him: "You are a man who still has some ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*) in you".<sup>31</sup> The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) rebuked Abū Dharr to demonstrate that derogatory speech about race fit entirely under pre-Islamic misconceptions. The Muslim prohibition of racism demonstrates that it represents a

descent toward a worse spiritual condition. Through his countering of racism, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advanced beyond individual moral constraints to tackle institutional manifestations of racism. Through the arrangement of al-Mu'ākhāh (the pact of brotherhood), Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) united the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār by forming couples from diverse ethnicities whose faith connection superseded blood ties. Ibn Hishām tells that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) arranged a friendship between Salmān al-Fārisī, a Persian, and Abū al-Dardā', an Arab from the Quraysh tribe.<sup>32</sup> By disrupting historic social hierarchy patterns, the new example of social organization showed that it was possible to create a different organizing structure.

Throughout Qur'ānic revelation, the text raised obscure community figures and gave them significant social standing. The Qur'ān devotes a full chapter named Sūrat Luqmān to Luqmān the African sage, who receives his description based on wisdom and pious acts instead of his racial background or heredity.<sup>33</sup> The exegetical tradition describes him as dark-complexioned and formerly enslaved, yet his advice to his son evolved into code for moral instruction which Muslim believers follow universally. Through mentioning Luqmān al-Qushayrī seeks to dismantle common biases which prove that wise understanding exists independently of social rank.<sup>34</sup> Prophetic anti-racism values form the essential framework of Islamic anti-racism since its beginning. The ideology needs to be implemented by regular action within current situations. Many modern Muslim societies persist in facing various racial issues that include treatment based on skin color along with nationalistic preferences between ethnic groups and the practice of class discrimination. Social practices typically do not match the ideals that are written in text. A renewed commitment to prophetic anti-racism needs to establish institutional changes alongside Qur'ānic value-based ethical teaching. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s exemplary way of life should transcend mere ceremonial worship to produce concrete advancements in society.

The prophetic model presents a wider perspective of social change than analytical liberalism does. The Islamic approach to anti-racism targets external structures while working toward a holistic solution by addressing both external social inequality and the inner pride and arrogance harbored by individuals. Al-Ghazālī considers two spiritual ailments known as 'ujb (self-conceit) and kibr (arrogance) as the most destructive flaws that can damage an individual's wholesome morality.<sup>35</sup> Islam uses activism to improve both society and people's spiritual state while also healing such spiritual disorders. According to Islamic belief about the end times, all people, regardless of their race, will receive equal divine judgment. Muslims believe that God will judge all souls individually on the Day of Judgment since each soul bears only their own deeds.<sup>36</sup> Human beings thus have only one criterion to measure their conduct, and it will be righteousness. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) confirmed this vision, stating that people will be gathered barefoot and

naked, without wealth or status, and judged solely on their deeds.<sup>37</sup> The doomsday vision neutralizes every racial and ethnic edge it provides as well as demonstrating that earthly socio-cultural tags are temporary.

The Qur'ānic stance against racism grows from the prophetic example by actively building an institutional structure of anti-racism. Through its theological construction, the Qur'ān carves out a framework that rejects racial superiority at every spiritual, ethical, social and political dimension, and enforces divine equality. Contemporary Muslim communities face the crucial task of reestablishing this theological framework into their legal systems, religious communications and community ethical frameworks to fight multiple forms of racism.

### **Racism and Ethnic Discrimination in Contemporary Societies**

The appeal to the universality of human rights is, therefore, coming under increasing attack as racism and ethnic discrimination continue to prevail in the societies of the present. Even with the improved global law, awareness campaigns, and international cooperation, racial and ethnic inequalities find roots in many institutions. Becoming prevalent in the USA from articulated police base to the cultural horror of ethnic cleansing in Myanmar and the institutional racism of caste-based discrimination in South Asia, the manifestations of racism are highly diverse but it is rooted in one thing: the false belief in inherited superiority or inferiority based on race, colour, or ethnic origin. However, the vertical axis (the pyramid of power, race, gender, politics, etc.), on the other hand, was entirely rejected by the Qur'ānic worldview, and there was an alternative theological basis that could support a vigorous critique of current injustices. New sociological studies in modern times, such as those by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, have brought up “color-blind racism,” whereby structural inequalities continue. At the same time, formal equality prevails, thus demonstrating how, with these covert systems, racial disparities are perpetuated instead of open bias.<sup>38</sup> This reverberates, upside-down, the Qur'ānic insistence on justice, outside the eyes. In Surah al-Ḥujurāt, Qur'ān makes its basic proclamation: “O humankind! We have formed you from a male and a female and divided you into nations and tribes so that you may get to know each other. Evenly, the most noble of you in the eyes of God is the best of you. Surely, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware”.<sup>39</sup> This verse actually does not reject racial superiority. It redirects the entire discourse by associating human dignity with the taqwā (God-consciousness) phenomenon, not phenotype, geography or lineage.

When read in the context of the rest of the world's racist worldview, this verse handicaps any ethno-nationalist ideology. This is directly opposed, according to Muhammad al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, to ideas which assert primacy based on race or tribe; the Qur'ān speaks about the unity of origin by stating the creation from a male and a female.<sup>40</sup> He elucidates that through a direct reference to the male and female, which is the starting point of human existence, the verse eliminates all feelings of



superiority based on descent, race or locality. This has direct relevance to nationalist ideologies, which often use the justification of “cultural purity” or “native rights” in marginalizing minorities. Ethnic discrimination, in a post-colonial society, has transformed into very sophisticated forms of marginality where the local communities, migrants and religious minorities are discriminated against. In India, for instance, such groups as Dalits and lower-caste Muslims face systematic segregation based on cultural or historical arguments. However, the Qur’ān refutes all such constructions through its ontological statement of equality. When the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came out with the Farewell Sermon, he asserted, “There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor of a non-Arab over an Arab, and neither of a white over a black, nor a black over a white—except through righteousness”.<sup>41</sup> The universality of this pronouncement works as a direct slap at the current ethno-racial hierarchies.

Unsurprisingly, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) preached this but institutionalized it in the first Muslim society in Madīnah. He founded a Black Abyssinian, Bilāl, as the first mu’adhdhin (a caller to prayer), and he also made leadership positions for non-Arabs such as Ṣuhayb al-Rūmī and Salmān al-Fārisī. These were not symbolic behaviours but real manifestations of moral excellence (not ethnic ancestry) ascribed to one position in Muslim society. On the other hand, numerous contemporary societies have kept up with the symbolic diversity while substantive ones endure, thus revealing that the reach of racism policy can not be reversed. Islamophobia is on the rise in Modern Europe, and is generally racially defined, which targets people of Middle Eastern, South Asian, or African ancestry. Even if couched in terms of “culture” or “security,” it often reverberates with largely hidden racial insecurities. This corresponds to the opinion of Yasir Qadhi, who contends that Islamophobia is “a form of racialized othering” that fails to take into account the Qur’ānic ethos of mutual recognition (ta’āruf) and shared humanity.<sup>42</sup> Such othering, from the Islamic perspective, is unjust, not just socially, but theologically, as it contradicts the divine will for human diversity to be a source of understanding, not of conflict.

Moreover, racism nowadays is quite often a part of economic structures. Poverty and exclusion among African and Afro-descendant populations in Latin America and the Caribbean are based on colonial slavery. The repeated invocation to the oppressed (al-mustaḍ‘afūn) to receive justice, as well as the freedom of slaves,<sup>43</sup> in the Qur’ān implies an active imperative to take down the racial injustice systems of economic inequality established. As Ibn Kathīr states, this is the Qur’ānic conception of the concept of liberty; it represents a material, spiritual and social obligation.<sup>44</sup> Muslim communities are also not exempt from internalized racism. Colorism, tribal elitism, and ethnic exclusivity still plague the ideal of the Qur’ān. For instance, in some Arab or South Asian populations marital discrimination according to skin tone or ethnic background goes against the Islamic model of brotherhood (ukhuwwah).

This calls for restating the Islamic education, where ethics is not a matter of abstract theology, but actual practice. Just as ‘Abd Allāh Nāṣir al-Raḥmānī contends, the Qur’ān’s ethical mandates need to be reactivated in terms of community structures, sermons and curricula to reverse such embedded partialities.<sup>45</sup>

From the standpoint of jurisprudence, Muslim jurists used to recognize the frightening manifestations of ‘aṣabiyyah (partisanship or group chauvinism) which Ibn Khaldūn attributed to one of the sources of social decadence.<sup>46</sup> The modern fiqh must also answer for the legal aspects of racism, by using ijtihād (the independent reasoning) to respond with Qur’ānic ethics to unequal access to resources, prejudiced judicial treatment and education. Against this backdrop, the Qur’ānic paradigm is not limited to a critique of racism but constitutes an integral counter-ethic. It commands inner transformation through taqwā, social justice through social structural reform, and communal solidarity through a confessional awareness of divine oneness. The Qur’ānic exhortation to equality and justice still looks not only relevant but necessary in an age of heightened polarization.

**Table: Global Racial Disparities and Qur’ānic Ethical Violations**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Racial/Ethnic Issue</b>	<b>Islamic Ethical Violation (Qur’ānic Principle)</b>
United States	Police brutality and mass incarceration of Black Americans	Violation of justice, <sup>47</sup> equality <sup>48</sup>
India	Caste and religious discrimination against Dalits and Muslims in India	Contradicts mutual dignity, <sup>49</sup> fairness <sup>50</sup>
Brazil	Afro-Brazilian marginalization in education and employment sectors	Undermines taqwā-based honor <sup>51</sup>
Myanmar	Ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims	Denial of right to life and dignity <sup>52</sup>
Europe	Islamophobia and refugee discrimination	Violates hospitality and brotherhood <sup>53</sup>
Middle East	Anti-Black racism and labor inequality	Denies unity of mankind <sup>54</sup> , justice <sup>55</sup>

This table sheds light on current forms of systemic racism in various societies. Among Black Americans, police brutality and the national hefty prison numbers unfairly target them in the United States. Caste based and religious marginalization of Dalits and Muslims is social and institutional in India. Likewise, Afro-Brazilians suffer ongoing exclusion at school and in the workplace, which continues the deep-rooted racial divide in Latin American societies.

### **Reclaiming Qur'ānic Equality in Muslim Societies**

As the world of many Muslim societies becomes fraught with socio-political fragmentation as well as sectarianism and hierarchies of race, the call for the return of the Qur'ānic ideal of human equality means not just a theological enterprise but also a socio-ethical necessity. Underpinned by an absolute possessiveness for equality based on the creation of all humans through God, moral responsibility and universal judgment, at the heart of the Qur'ānic discourse on human dignity is an intractable insistence on equality. The verse, *"O mankind! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous"*,<sup>56</sup> is still one of the most forceful ways in which religious literature presents egalitarian ethics. The possible interpretation of this verse is exceptionally underutilized in modern Muslim reform discourse in tackling intra-Muslim ethnocentrism, colorism and nationalistic pride. From a Qur'ānic perspective, the orientations of hierarchies around lineage, tribes or races are always challenged. Classical exegetes like al-Rāzī in his commentary on the above Qur'ānic verse complained that despite the variety of these human beings, it cannot become a ground for the superiority of ethics but evidence of divine wisdom in creation.<sup>57</sup> The Qur'ān does not simply promote strict equality; it bears a theology of humility in confronting the divine creation. The fact that all human beings share a single soul<sup>58</sup> conditions a basis from which to invalidate any claims to ontological superiority. Nevertheless, such ethical precepts have never quite translated into social practice in the predominantly Muslim communities, where caste-like divisions (for example, a division akin to Ashrāf-Ajlāf in South Asia) and ethnic hegemonies (as in some instances with Arab nationalism) continue to exert themselves on relations of communities.

The greatest historical irony is that at a time when Islam is arguably revolutionizing the concept of equality, and especially when compared to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s last sermon in which he declared that no Arab is in any way better than a non-Arab and no white better than a black unless in terms of piety (taqwā), Muslim societies have desacralized ancient or even foreign hierarchies and made them into sacred social rules. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s inclusiveness in appointing, such as Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, an Abyssinian ex-slave, as the first mu'adhdhin acts as proof that anti-racist action was not just verbal but institutionalized too. Ibn al-Jawzī reports in his *Ṣafat al-Ṣāfiya* that his life was not only an intimate friend but a symbol of the universality of the Islamic ummah.<sup>59</sup> However, the neglect of such fundamental cultural Prophetic practices is observed today in the social marginalisation of Afro-Arab / in the Gulf, of Black Muslims / in North Africa, or of minorities / in Pakistan / Iran. To reclaim Qur'ānic equality in context demands more than cited scriptural ideals; it requires the development of social mechanisms that would embody taqwā as far as meritocracy is concerned. This may be in the form of representative religious leadership, distributed economic opportunities and

removal of dispensed privilege based on race and tribe. An example of its own within our contemporary history is the Sudanese Mahdist movement that in its complexity prompted a Qur'ān-based criticism of Islamic identity that had an Arab designation in the 19th century, and which shows that the reform based on theological authenticity can not only [be] possible but had a historical substantiation.<sup>60</sup>

Modern Muslim scholars, too, have demanded going back to the Qur'ānic ethic of justice as a lived reality. In 'Fī Fiqh al-Sīrah', Muhammad al-Ghazālī makes a strong point that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s leadership was proto-inclusive, literally delegating important tasks to non-Arabs, former slaves, and women in the process of harmonizing community issues, thus contradicting the tribal rules of his time.<sup>61</sup> This inclusiveness was rooted in the Qur'ān's refutations of equality based on fear of tokenism. The persistence of a lack of such models in many Muslim settings points to a departure not from modernity but from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s sunnah. One of the biggest theological issues with the reclamation of Qur'ānic equality is the survival of interpretive traditions that have been determined much more by medieval social realities rather than by Qur'ānic universals. The place of jurisprudence (fiqh) is that of literary work, but the ethical exegesis (tafsīr akhlāqī) must be rejuvenated. Today's critics, such as Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, asserted the need for a "hermeneutics of liberation" based in Qur'ānic justice, whereby the text is not only read as law, but also as an ethical discourse.<sup>62</sup> This would mean a different method of reading/Islamic exegesis: a method which would force one to read verses on jihad, punishment, social hierarchy in the light of verses which emphasize the need for mercy, dignity and equality.

There is also an urgent practical need for theological institutions in the Muslim world to re-examine such curricula as have promulgated elitist or racialized readings of the Islamic past. For example, many of the traditional texts in some of the South Asian madrasas still use racial or ethnic descriptors when narrating companions or scholars in a way that seems to compensate for hierarchical relationships. Dealing with such language is not a question of contemporary sensibility but Qur'ānic fidelity. Mocking people through their identities is a direct condemnation from the Qur'ān,<sup>63</sup> and its readers are cautioned against self-promoting superiority.<sup>64</sup> Reclaiming Qur'ānic equality also means giving visibility to minority voices within Muslim communities. The voices of Black Muslims, indigenous converts and non-Arab scholars have traditionally been silenced in mainstream Islamic debate. However, it is from these very points that new, Qur'ānically faithful critiques can do so. Modern Muslim intellectuals such as Sherman Jackson have suggested that the experience of racial inequality in America presents Muslims in the world with the opportunity to think about how their failure to practice Islamic justice internally.<sup>65</sup>

From the Islamic theological point of view, human equality is, in fact, not just a civil right, but a divine duty. The Qur'ān everywhere rejects all hierarchy except that of moral excellence by God alone and thus nullifies all human claims to superiority by race or tribe. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s creation of the mu'ākhāh (brotherhood) between Muhājirūn and Anṣār – irrespective of origin – was a strategic, but equally spiritual, move to erase class and ethnic divisions. Reclaiming such a model in the modern era would necessarily mean that mosques, religious establishments, and communal heads would express active repudiation of all kinds of racial bias in marriage, leadership, or communal representation. Theory as utopia is no match for Qur'ānic vision of equality, which is a blueprint. The failure to heed it in Muslim societies today is not a failure of revelation – it is a failure of collective will. Recapturing this ethos requires a sustained reversion to the moral and theological essence of the Qur'ān, disruption of vested class hierarchies, and resurrection of a prophetic tradition that exalted the outcasts as an act of justice, not grace.

### **Theological and Ethical Response to Racism**

Theology within the context of Islam draws on the Qur'ān and the Prophetic tradition, provides a strong, uncompromising denunciation of racism and ethnic discrimination. Theologically, Islam acknowledges that every single human is the product of the same creation of God, and is the handiwork of the creator, and is endowed with a dignified nature. The Qur'ān asserts: “And We have certainly honored the children of Adam”.<sup>66</sup> This verse is prologue to a theological statement of human dignity of all people, irrespective of race, ethnicity or nation. Al-Razī (similar to Fakhr) scholars like Fakhr al-Dīn, al-Rāzī, will claim that this verse affirms a universal karāmah that precedes human differences.<sup>67</sup> The theological reason for the rejection of racism is also clearly reflected in the creation theology of the Qur'ān. As it declares: “O humankind, We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another”.<sup>68</sup> According to Ibn 'Āshūr, this verse overturns the premise on which racial or ethnic superiority rests, in attributing divine wisdom to diversity: not for hierarchy, but for mutual recognition and cooperation.<sup>69</sup>

Islamic ethical teachings (akhlāq) can help create more anti-racist imperatives because they put ethics in the context of the pursuit of justice (‘adl) and ihsān (excellence). Racism is a type of ḡlūm (oppression) because it uses individuals as tools that are ascribed no human status and worth. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) defined oppression as the dark of multi-layered darkness on the Day of Judgment.<sup>70</sup> Ethical violation of racial prejudice, which is an unjust classification and superiority, has theological implications. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)'s Farewell Sermon (Khuṭbat al-Wadā‘) is a clear affirmation of Islamic anti-racism. He stated, “There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an

Arab, nor a white over a black, nor a black over a white — except by piety”.<sup>71</sup> Combined with the fact that this declaration is made at the apex of his life and mission, it commands the stamp of a theological will. This statement, scholars including Ibn Kathīr understand it to be a direct rejection of the tribal hierarchies of pre-Islamic Arabia and a universal declaration of the Islamic value of taqwā.<sup>72</sup>

Islamic ethics are also pro-active solidarity with the oppressed. This ethical tendency is stated in the Qur’ānic injunction: “Be steadfast in upholding justice as witnesses for Allah”.<sup>73</sup> The main point discussed here is not merely internal equality but public championing for justice. The verse is, by these contemporary Muslim scholars such as Mohammad Hashim Kamali, seen as a divine command to fight all forms of structural injustice, including race-based injustices.<sup>74</sup> Theologically speaking, racism is not only a social sin but a metaphysical error. Iblīs’ refusal to bow down to Ādam –because “I am better than him”<sup>75</sup>– becomes the archetypal act of arrogance on the assumption of superiority. Classic commentators, al-Qurtubī, for instance, contend that this is the core of all supremacist ideologies.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, any belief in racial supremacy is the re-enactment of the sin of Iblīs, not just unethical but heretical in every Muslim’s theology.

In the practical Prophetic model, the example of Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, an Abyssinian slave who became the first mu’adhdhin of Islam during the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)’s lifetime, is very symbolic. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in a publicized manner, raised Bilāl, saying: “Bilāl, what you have said is closer to Allah than what others said”.<sup>77</sup> When Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī once said insulting things about Bilāl using the words “the son of a black woman,” the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) rebuked him and said, “You are a man who still has jāhiliyyah in you”.<sup>78</sup> This clear association of racism with pre-Islamic ignorance of jāhiliyyah makes it a retrograde character to be morally and theologically rejected. Human dignity and social cohesion are from higher ethical vantage points of maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah (objectives of Islamic law) and systematically defeated by racism. Intelligent thinkers such as Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī argue that maqāṣid require a system to resist systems that perpetuate ethnic stratification or inequality.<sup>79</sup> An ethical approach to racism as part of this scheme has no choice; it is one of achieving the higher ends of the Sharī‘ah.

Current Muslim societies are still plagued by internalized racism, most notably in the form of colorism and ethnic hierarchies. There are occasions where a religious base is exploited for masking racial superiority, especially among the elite or ethnic majorities. Theologically, however, such contradictions are not only hypocritical but also undermine the unity (tawḥīd), noting that the ummah is established upon. The Qur’ān repeatedly warns against divisions: “and be not of those who ascribe partners (unto Him); Of those who split up their religion and became schismatic...”.<sup>80</sup> Racism, as a disuniting force, hence endangers the very unity that the Qur’ān insists upon. Besides, Islamic ethics stimulate empathy (raḥmah), humility (tawāḍu‘), sincerity (ikhlās) — all of them are alien to the spirit of racism.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is referred to as “a mercy to the worlds”,<sup>81</sup> and his character was the embodiment of inclusiveness, acceptance, and affirmation of the excluded. These ethical values have to be brought back to life and institutionalized in Muslim education, khutbahs and community discussions.

In addition, Islamic theological institutions and mosques have to be responsive to challenging racism by producing khutbah toolkits, reforms to the curriculum, and community projects. Islamic seminaries can integrate training in critical race theory on a Qur’ānic basis to develop an indigenous theology of anti-racism. Although such academic syntheses remain infrequent, they are theologically legitimate and ethically required. The road to resist racism also becomes ethical in *du‘ā* and spiritual reform (*tazkiyah*). Racism is usually based on a disease of the *nafs* (ego), and Islamic spirituality calls for the cleansing of the self from pride (*kibr*), envy (*ḥasad*), and hatred (*ḥiqd*). The Qur’ān commands, “Successful is the one who purifies it \[the soul]”.<sup>82</sup> In other words, a true response to racism necessarily includes both inner struggle (*jihād al-nafs*) and structural activism. Islamic theology and ethics come together to determine that racism is not just a sociopolitical problem, but a serious moral and theological betrayal. It is constituted by the Qur’ānic message, the prophetic event and model, and the moral of Islam to create a holistic framework which not only proclaims against racism, but calls upon believers to actively undo it both within themselves and among other societies.

### **Conclusion**

This research has examined the Qur’ānic idea of human equality and the lessons it provides for tackling the present problem of racism and ethnic discrimination. The Qur’ān demonstrates a sound structure for equality based on the theological concept that there is one soul that created all mankind and conferred on them dignity. The idea of universal dignity (*karāmah*) and moral capacity, which abounds in the words of the central verses, soundly testifies to the lack of a hierarchy in the divine moral order based on race. In addition, the Prophetic teachings and practices, especially the case with Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ and the Farewell sermons, reflect the Qur’ān’s anti-racist ethos. This research demonstrates, through a critical analysis of present racial and ethnic injustices, the constraints of secular power to identify the moral substrates of equality. The Qur’ānic perspective that overcomes both biological and racial determinism charted a counter-narrative that makes moral accountability and righteousness (*taqwā*) the prime value in human society. This is a sharp contrast to modern civilization’s racial hierarchies and ethno-nationalist consciousness. Would not, then, the reclaiming of the Qur’ānic vision of equality in Muslim-majority societies where the ethnic and racial prejudices still prevail become necessary? To undo these inheritances, theological re-education, since it is carried out through Qur’ān-centric curricula and by *tafsīr* with an emphasis on justice, is needed. Islamic pedagogy and mosque leadership are also critical in

fighting against racism, and they would lead to a further comprehensive appreciation of what brings about human dignity. The Qur'ānic idea of equality of all humans is a rich support for a moral basis to counter racism and ethnic discrimination. Beyond Muslim circles, its applicability has universal relevance, to enlighten the world's debate on the issues of race, justice, and human rights. Further work in comparative theology and interfaith activism could help us to know more about how the Qur'ānic ethics might be able to inform the global anti-racist movements.

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