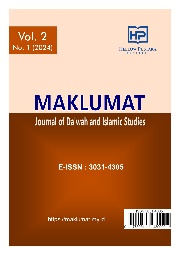
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Book Review

**40 on Justice: The Prophetic Voice on Social Reform.**

**Book Review by Abdulkadir Salaudeen**

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Reviewer : Abdulkadir Salaudeen

Let me start by saying *40 on Justice* should make it to the shelf of anyone (not necessarily Muslim) who is inclined to justice and needs to know about justice. It is rich in anecdotal accounts that make the heart inclined to justice even in the most corrupt and immoral environment. Yet, it is a not a reference book that leads researchers to primary source. Researchers on justice will definitely find it problematic since many of the quotes therein are not referenced for verification. For this reason, the book, though with appealing title, might be looked down upon by researchers in the academia.

In addition, many sayings of the Prophet SAW (Hadiths) mentioned in the book are not referenced. To cite an instance, the Prophet Muhammad was reported to have sent Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ to supplicate for and seek healing through recitation (ruqyah) in the form of Sūrah al-Fātiḥah over a non-Muslim chief (page 280). Reference to this narration is not given; and the hadith seems to have been misreported. It was recorded by Buhari in his *Sahih* in the chapter with the title “To do Ruqyah by Reciting Suratul Al-Fatiha.” This aside, even when hadiths are mentioned with reference, the authenticity or otherwise of the referenced hadiths\*which are in scores\*is left to readers to independently verify.

A novice who is not yet equipped to ascertain authenticity or otherwise of hadiths will be left in limbo. Researchers whose scholarship is advanced enough to do verification would have to do extra work for reading *40 on Justice*. One would think the author, Dr. Omar Suleiman, deliberately intends to punish readers for reading his book. But can an author of a book on justice be unjust by subjecting readers of his work to pain? This is unlikely. Or is the book meant for non-academics and novices whose priority is to know about justice in Islam and are less concerned about technicalities? This is plausible. For the author is an advanced academic and understands the tradition in the academe.

The book has forty chapters with two major objectives: to highlight virtues of justice and its necessity for peaceful world and anathematize injustice as harbinger of destruction and world crisis. It cautions against the evils of injustice which is intrinsically destructive just as it emphasizes the necessity of justice for a peaceful world. Discussing justice from Islamic perspective, the author makes reference to a profound slogan “no justice, no peace” and rightly goes further to explain that while the slogan is not actually taken from Islam directly, Islam is closer to this idea than any other system in the world. I make a slight modification: Islam is not only closer to the slogan “no justice, no peace,” it embodies the slogan.

*40 on Justice* is timely especially coming at a time when injustice has permeated all spheres of life and the globe is enveloped not only in injustices but by injustices. It is one of the most comprehensive books written on justice in Islam in the modern time. Justice, as discussed in this book, is not just a virtue; it is a necessity for human existence\*if that existence must be a peaceful one. The symmetry relationship between justice and peace is starkly captured in Chapter 39 which is titled “Without Justice there can be no Peace.” It means to say, peace is justice and justice is peace.

The first chapter “the gravity of injustice in Islam|” prepares the mind of readers towards the realization of the necessity of justice in Islam. If acts of injustice result in grievous consequences, avoiding injustice and embracing justice becomes obligatory even by common sense. Yet, justice is not left to common sense. Islam, and the reforms achieved through it, is premised on justice. Prophetic voice on social reform revolves around justice as evidenced in *40 on Justice*. Plus, beneath the Prophetic justice, the author skillfully wove together priceless quotes on justice and oppression from non-religious perspectives\*aligning them with the prophetic voice. This shows that justice is a universal concept that has positive\*and only positive\*connotations.

The author addresses acts of injustice done to the masses for which the masses (victims of injustice) have to be unjustly blamed. It is an ugly practice by those in power to blame victims of injustice and exonerate themselves from acts of injustice. This practice has been ideologized and has thus become an ideological weapon employed by palace scholars to sedate victimized masses into thinking they are victims of, and are been punished by, their own sins and misdeeds. Deconstructing this dangerous thought, the author unequivocally sets the record straight by quoting Sufyān al-Thawrī, may Allah be pleased with him, who stated that: “There are two groups of people that if they are righteous, people will be righteous, and if they are corrupt, people will be corrupt. They are the scholars and the rulers” (page 22).

The author appropriately gives what I describe “ignoble alliance between palace scholars and unjust rulers” the needed focus in Chapter Seven which he titled “The Ruling on Silence and Injustice.” He bemoans legitimization of injustice by unjust rulers and dictators\*using religious scholars as protective garment. “Exploiting the cloak of scholarship to justify ugly injustices is”, according to the author, “a very old propaganda technique that has been used by Christians such as Pope Urban II as well as Muslims” (page 58). The author is absolutely right in emphasizing that dictators/scholars unholy alliance is not peculiar to any religion. However, justice demands that he narrow his instance down to specific Muslim clerics or group of clerics who use religion as propaganda technique to defend injustices of unjust rulers just as he mentions Pope Urban II as reference among the Christians.

The author asserts that the silence of scholars in the face of injustice “is extremely sinful as they are religious authorities and must not be ambiguous towards acts of injustice.” I agree. But the author should have gone further to deconstruct some of the religious texts employed by these palace scholars to justify their silence that implicitly encourages perpetuation of injustice against the innocent. Although, the author was very candid in his condemnation of scholars’ taciturnity in the face of injustice as “extremely sinful”, I still feel the inherent danger in scholars’ silence is not underlined enough. It is, in my opinion, the greatest betrayal of scholarship and trust.

The concept “silence, is sometimes, violence” (page 59) is a point worthy of note in *40 on Justice*. The Sunna (prophetic tradition) of helping the oppressed and preventing the oppressor from oppressing the oppressed has been bidden farewell by not a few groups of clerics. This dangerous trend of criminalizing speaking truth to power and making it look sinful\*of grievous category\*in the Muslim world, paints the grotesquest picture of religion. While religion is an agent of liberation, criminalization of speaking truth to power amounts to religious colonization; not liberation. Here, the powerful explanation of the author is too profound to ignore. He writes:

We do not sit back and allow the oppressor to carry on committing injustice and sins. Sometimes silence is violence; if we do not speak, we risk the lives of the oppressed. And what is worse, is to tell a victim of injustice, to remain silent. Unfortunately, it has happened and continues to happen on many occasions that a victim is shamed into remaining silent in the face of oppression.

*40 on Justice* acknowledges the fact that speaking up against injustice has to be timely and tactical. While it establishes the fact that it is desirable to speak against injustice, dictators, and unjust rulers, and stand up for justice, it also informs its readers when to apply the break. When speaking against injustice angers the unjust, stirs them to more violence, and makes them commits more injustice, silence becomes golden. What the author ignores is the fact that even when one is compelled to maintain silence for practical purposes, it remains a temporary measure and the weakest level of faith until one is able to correct injustice by tongue (speaking up) or by hand (strength).

*40 on Justice* does not isolate unjust rulers and their collaborators (compromised scholars) for criticism. The book, conscious of justice, is just enough to go beyond highlighting the injustices of rulers. It widens its scope to discuss the injustices we commit against ourselves. This is well captured in Chapter Eleven, titled “The Comprehensiveness of Taṭfīf (Short-Changing).” Tatfif, according to the author, is a very broad concept which is often restricted to business and financial transactions. His words; “It is important to remember that it is not limited to finance, taṭfīf can also be spiritual and emotional.” (Page 93). He goes on to mention how we variously commit tatfif (short-changing) in our relation to our Creator (Allah), as teachers and students, as husbands and wives, as parents and children, and even in our workplace.

All said, every mosque and private library deserves a copy or copies of *40 on Justice*. When it comes to justice, it is an all-important book and a must read. It is not an ideological book, so the ideology of its author is not in question. Rather, the book discusses justice\*a concept that all faithful on the broad ideological spectrum like to attribute to themselves irrespective of ideological inclinations.

As pointed above, the book is very rich in content as both the laity and the scholars have a lot to benefit from it. Its major drawback which is very discomforting is that academics searching for reference work on justice would need to look elsewhere.