	<p style="text-align: center;">THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND HISTORY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Vol.3, No.2, 2025</p>	<p>ISSN P: 3006-3329 ISSN E: 3006-3337</p>
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Human Dignity in the Holy Qur'an and Guru Granth Sahib

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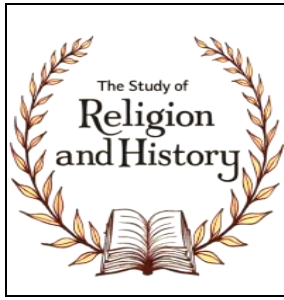
Abstract

The notion of human dignity constitutes a foundational ethical and theological principle within both Islamic and Sikh traditions. This article advances a comparative hermeneutical inquiry into the conceptualization of human dignity as articulated in the Holy Qur'an and the Guru Granth Sahib. While contemporary human rights discourse frequently grounds dignity in secular rationalism, both traditions situate it within a metaphysical and theocentric framework rooted in divine creation, moral responsibility, and spiritual equality. The Qur'an presents human dignity as an intrinsic and divinely bestowed attribute, conferred upon all descendants of Adam irrespective of socio-cultural distinctions. In contrast, the Guru Granth Sahib emphasizes the unity of divine essence (Ik Onkar) and articulates a radical egalitarian vision that transcends caste, class, and ethnicity. Through a close textual analysis of primary sources in Arabic and Gurmukhi, this study demonstrates a profound convergence in ethical outlooks, despite theological differences.

Keywords: *Human Dignity in the Holy Qur'an and Guru Granth Sahib*

1. Introduction

The discourse on human dignity occupies a central position in contemporary legal, philosophical, and theological scholarship. However, its articulation within sacred traditions offers a deeper ontological grounding than purely secular frameworks. In Islamic theology, human dignity is intrinsically linked to the concept of khilāfah (vicegerency), whereby human beings are entrusted with moral agency and responsibility on earth. Similarly, Sikhism, emerging in a socio-historical milieu marked by rigid hierarchies and caste stratification, articulated a transformative vision of equality grounded in divine unity. This study seeks not merely to juxtapose two traditions but to explore their dialogical

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potential in shaping a more inclusive and ethically grounded conception of human dignity.

2. Qur'ānic Foundations of Human Dignity

2.1 Ontological Honor of Humanity

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

“Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam” (Qur’ān 17:70)

This verse establishes human dignity as an ontological reality rather than a socially constructed attribute. The term karramnā signifies a form of honor that is inherent and unconditional. Analytical Insight:” Dignity is not contingent upon race, wealth, or status, It is universally granted to all humanity, It forms the ethical foundation for equality and justice”. This principle has been interpreted by contemporary scholars as a cornerstone for Islamic human rights discourse (Kamali, 2002).

2.2 Spiritual Elevation of Human Beings

وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي

“And I breathed into him of My Spirit” (Qur’ān 15:29)

This verse elevates human existence beyond mere materiality by establishing a direct spiritual linkage between the Creator and human beings. Explanation: “Human beings possess a dual nature: material and spiritual, The divine spirit signifies intrinsic worth and moral capacity” This spiritual dimension underpins the concept of dignity

2.3 Universal Equality

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا

“O mankind! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another” (Qur’ān 49:13)

Explanation: This verse dismantles all forms of racial and tribal superiority, asserting that the only معيار of distinction is taqwā (moral consciousness).

3. Human Dignity in Prophetic Teachings

3.1 Equality in the Farewell Sermon

لَا فَضْلَ لِعَرَبِيٍّ عَلَىٰ أَعْجَمِيٍّ وَلَا لِأَعْجَمِيٍّ عَلَىٰ عَرَبِيٍّ إِلَّا بِالتَّقْوَىٰ

Explanation: Absolute rejection of racial hierarchy, Establishment of moral equality, Universal applicability beyond religious boundaries.(musnad ahmad,23489)

3.2 Protection of Non-Muslim Citizens

مَنْ أَدَىٰ ذِمِّيًّا فَأَنَا خَصْمُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

Explanation: This hadith provides a powerful legal-ethical guarantee for the protection of non-Muslims, emphasizing that their dignity is inviolable.

4. Human Dignity in the Guru Granth Sahib

4.1 Divine Unity as the Basis of Equality

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ

Explanation: God is One (Ik Onkar), All humanity derives from the same divine source, Therefore, all human beings possess equal dignity

4.2 Rejection of Social Hierarchy

ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਭੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਿਚਾਨਬੋ

Explanation: This verse rejects caste distinctions and affirms the essential unity of humankind.

4.3 Sanctity of Life

ਸਭਨਾ ਜੀਆ ਕਾ ਇਕੁ ਦਾਤਾ

Explanation: All life originates from a single Creator, Every individual life is sacred, Violence against humanity is morally indefensible

4.4 Universal Brotherhood

ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ

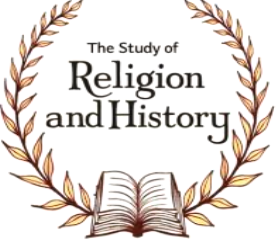
Explanation: This teaching promotes an inclusive worldview in which no individual is considered an outsider.

5. Comparative Ethical Framework

Both Islamic and Sikh traditions demonstrate a remarkable convergence on core ethical and theological principles, despite differences in historical and doctrinal development. These shared values form a strong foundation for interfaith understanding and social harmony.

Principle	Islam	Sikhism
Divine Unity	<i>Tawhīd</i> — Absolute Oneness of God (Qur'ānic monotheism)	<i>Ik Onkar</i> — The One Supreme Reality
Human Equality	All humans are equal (Qur'ān 49:13)	Universal brotherhood and equality of all humanity
Human Dignity	Inherent dignity of mankind (Qur'ān 17:70)	Spiritual equality and respect for all individuals
Justice	<i>ʿAdl</i> and <i>Qist</i> — Establishment of justice (Qur'ān 16:90)	<i>Dharam</i> — Righteousness, moral order, and justice

Analysis:

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This convergence suggests that both traditions provide complementary ethical frameworks capable of informing modern human rights discourse.

6. Interfaith Implications Islamic Perspective

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ (Qur'an 109:6).

This verse affirms religious pluralism and coexistence.

Sikh Perspective

ਸਰਬੱਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ

Explanation: This principle advocates universal welfare and collective well-being.

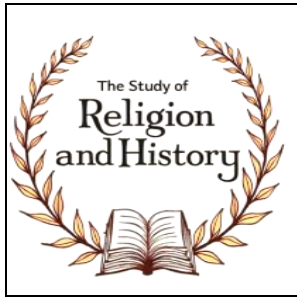
7. Analytical Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals that both the Qur'an and the Guru Granth Sahib articulate a deeply rooted and theologically grounded conception of human dignity. While their doctrinal frameworks differ, their ethical outcomes converge remarkably.

Both traditions:

- * Affirm intrinsic human worth
- * Reject discrimination
- * Promote justice and equality
- * Encourage interfaith harmony
- * These shared ethical commitments provide a powerful foundation for contemporary pluralistic societies.

Human dignity is often articulated as an inherent entitlement that underlies civil, political, economic, and social rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) famously begins by proclaiming the "inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" (United Nations, 1948). While the UDHR adopts a secular language, both the Qur'anic and Sikh traditions provide theological foundations that resonate deeply with these principles. The Qur'an's emphasis on universal human worth and the Guru Granth Sahib's affirmation of spiritual equality present pre-modern ethical paradigms that anticipate modern human rights ideals. These religious sources can, therefore, inform contemporary discussions on dignity as a universal value transcending cultural or religious boundaries.

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9. Dignity, Justice, and Legal Frameworks

9.1 Islamic Legal Interpretation: Islamic legal theory (fiqh) traditionally places justice (‘adl) at the core of its ethical mandate:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

“Indeed, Allah enjoins justice and good conduct” (Qur’ān 16:90).

Justice in this Islamic paradigm is not merely procedural but deeply connected with human dignity. This verse highlights that ethical conduct and equitable treatment are essential for protecting human dignity at all levels of social organization.

9.2 Sikh Ethical Mandate: The Guru Granth Sahib similarly elevates justice (dharam) as a cosmic principle guiding human conduct:

ਧਰਮੁ ਦੀਪਕੁ ਜਗਤ ਮਹਿ ਚਾਨਣੁ

“Righteousness is the light that illumines the world.”

Justice, here, provides illumination for human relationships, reinforcing that dignity cannot be separated from righteous action.

10. Theological Nuances: Divine Relationship and Human Worth

Both traditions anchor human dignity in a personal relationship with the divine. In the Qur’ānic worldview, human beings are endowed with fitrah (innate moral disposition) and are appointed as God’s vicegerents on earth (khalīfah):

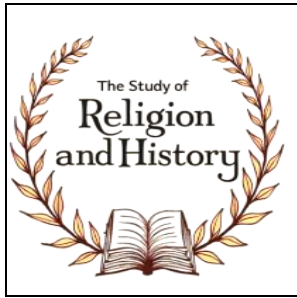
وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me”(Qur’ān 51:56)

This divine appointment implies responsibility, moral agency, and intrinsic worth. In Sikh theology, the repetition of Ik Onkar (One Creator) underscores that all lives participate in the same sacred reality. Human dignity, therefore, derives from this shared spiritual lineage rather than from hierarchical social status.

11. Intersection with Contemporary Citizenship and Law

The modern state, particularly in pluralistic societies such as Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, faces challenges synthesizing Islamic legal heritage with constitutional norms guaranteeing citizenship rights to religious minorities. Articles guaranteeing freedom of religion, expression, and equality before the law are often framed in secular legal language. Yet, when these provisions are interpreted through the lens of Qur’ānic and Sikh ethical principles, they acquire deeper resonance. For example, the principle of no compulsion in religion—لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ (Qur’ān 2:256)—can function as a legal hermeneutic promoting freedom of conscience. When paired with the Guru Granth Sahib’s repudiation

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of rigid hierarchies, a robust normative environment for minority citizenship emerges.

12. Educational Implications

Religion and education are deeply interconnected in framing human identity and dignity. In Muslim-majority contexts, educational curricula often emphasize Islamic principles. Integrating comparative religious ethics can strengthen interfaith understanding. Studies in religious pedagogy suggest that students exposed to diverse theological perspectives on dignity exhibit greater tolerance and empathy (Hefner, 2017). Incorporating scriptural insights from both the Qur'ān and Sikh texts into educational programs could promote deeper respect for pluralism in multicultural societies.

13. Interfaith Harmony and Shared Ethical Ground

Both traditions encourage peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. In the Qur'ānic lexicon:

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

“For you is your religion, and for me is mine” (Qur'ān 109:6).

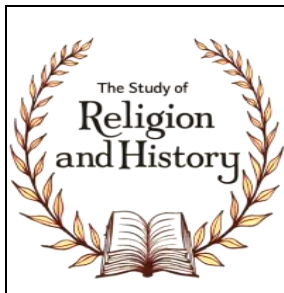
In Sikh teachings, the phrase **ਸਰਬਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ** (sarbat da bhala) expresses a universal prayer for the welfare of all beings, regardless of faith. These scriptural mandates provide common ethical ground for dialogue, cooperation, and joint initiatives promoting human dignity as a shared value.

14. Critical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges

While both traditions articulate strong ethical positions, practical realization of dignity and equality remains contested in modern socio-political contexts. Structural inequalities, discrimination against religious minorities, and legal ambiguities challenge the implementation of dignity-based norms. Critical theorists argue that hermeneutical reinterpretation must accompany legal reform to ensure that scriptural principles are actualized within state institutions and cultural practices (An-Na'im, 2008).

15. Policy Recommendations

- * Constitutional Interpretation: Encourage courts to incorporate theological principles of dignity in constitutional adjudication.
- * Interfaith Education: Design curricula that include comparative theological insights on human dignity.
- * Community Dialogue Platforms: Establish permanent councils including Islamic and Sikh scholars to promote shared ethical understanding.
- * Minority Rights Commissions: Strengthen institutional frameworks protecting the dignity and rights of religious minorities.

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- * Such recommendations anchor theological insights within operational legal and social frameworks.

16. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that human dignity is deeply anchored in both the Qur'ānic worldview and Sikh theology. While their theological vocabularies differ, both traditions converge on ethical commitments to equality, justice, and respect for all humanity. By situating human dignity within divine intentionality and moral responsibility, these traditions offer robust resources for contemporary human rights and interfaith discourse. The resonance between these frameworks affirms that religious traditions can enrich modern approaches to human dignity, citizenship, and mutual respect.

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