

The Compliance with the Eight Categories in Zakat Distribution and Accommodation: A Jurisprudential Study

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Abstract

According to Islamic law, it is well-known that the categories eligible for Zakat are limited to eight specific types, a matter altogether agreed upon and substantiated in the Quran and Sunnah. These categories deserve Zakat due to legitimate reasons and wisdom within Islamic jurisprudence. However, scholars have differed in defining the concept of these categories, in determining whether some categories persist or cease to exist at certain times, and in the ruling regarding the allocation of Zakat among some categories over others. There is also a debate on whether all these categories should be encompassed in Zakat distribution. Scholars have discussed the possibility of expanding the understanding of these eight categories or extending Zakat to similar categories or those related to them, considering the necessities of the time and the requirements of different Islamic societies. This research sheds light on the rulings related to the distribution of Zakat among the eight specified categories and the extent of their inclusivity. The research problem lies in the divergence of opinions among scholars, some advocating for a broader interpretation while others prefer a narrower view, and the extent to which the legitimate interests are considered in this regard. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach by gathering texts and studies from the works of past and contemporary scholars concerned with this issue, aiming to clarify and highlight its dimensions. It relies on both classical and contemporary Islamic legal sources and references. The expected outcomes of this research aim to benefit Zakat recipients, ensuring their interests are met and aiding them in fulfilling their material needs through Zakat. One of the significant findings emphasizes the necessity for Zakat institutions to adhere to Sharia principles in disbursing Zakat, contributing to the benefit of Islamic societies without conflicting with textual evidence and general Islamic principles.

Keywords: Sharia Principles, Eight Specified Categories, Zakat, Distribution, Inclusivity

Introduction

Zakat, as one of the pillars of Islam, has played a crucial role in the lives of Muslims. It stands as a mechanism of financial worship aimed at purifying both the human soul and possessions. In this context, the rights related to Zakat concerning other individuals are considered, acknowledging responsibilities towards others in terms of individuals acquiring such funds.

Theoretically, the wealthy are obligated to pay Zakat, which is then distributed among the needy. This distribution is conditioned to reach an optimum level for its categories. Zakat institutions are utilized to meet the needs of specific categories, especially the poor, improving their quality of life by enhancing economic capacities and personal development. Through this distribution, the effective impacts of Zakat emerge, allowing the poor and needy to transition from being recipients of Zakat to contributors in the future. Undoubtedly, this represents a form of effective contribution to the economic growth of nations.

Zakat reflects Islam's concern in combating the issue of poverty, striving to achieve great welfare and dignified life for Muslims. It serves to solidify the principle of social solidarity and altruism among members of the Islamic nation, motivating the wealthy to support the poor.

Zakat and Its Legitimacy

Zakat in the Arabic language signifies purity, growth, blessings, and an abundance of goodness. It's said that crops are 'zaka' (meaning flourish) when they grow and prosper, and a person is 'zaka' when their goodness and virtues increase. Similarly, spending is deemed 'zakat' when it brings blessings, and the soul is 'zakka' when purified (Ibn Manzur, 1994). Allah, the Highest, has said: "Indeed, he succeeds who purifies his soul," (Surah Ash-Shams, 9), meaning 'Indeed successful is the one who purifies it (the soul),' indicating purifying oneself from the filth of sins. And Allah, the Highest, has said: "Take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them to increase," (Surah At-Tawbah, 103), meaning 'take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them to increase.

Zakat has been named as such because it contributes to purifying its giver, fosters noble character traits within them, brings blessings to their wealth, helps enhance the well-being of the needy, and earns the blessings of Allah for the giver's deeds. It's also known as "sadaqah" (charity) because it comes from sincerity, aligning one's actions with their words and beliefs, indicating the servant's truthfulness in worshipping Allah (Al-Baali, n.d)

In the context of Islamic jurisprudence, Zakat is defined differently across various schools of thought. According to the Hanafi school, it is defined as: "The ownership of a specific portion of specific wealth designated for a specific individual for the sake of Allah" (Al-Ghanimi, 2010). In the Maliki school, it is defined as: "The extraction of a specified portion of specific wealth that has reached the threshold, for its deserving recipient, provided ownership has been established and it involves non-mineral wealth and agricultural produce" (Aalish, 1989). In the Shafi'i school, Zakat is defined as: "A term denoting a specific amount of specified wealth that must be disbursed for specified categories under specific conditions" (Ash-Shirbini, 1994). As for the Hanbali school, it is defined as: "An obligatory right in specified wealth for a specific group at a specific time" (Al-Buhuti, n.d.)

There are numerous of evidence in the Quran and Sunnah indicating its legitimacy and obligation. Among them is the verse: {وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ} (Al-Baqarah, 43). This verse is considered proof of the fundamental obligation of Zakat.

Another evidence is the Hadith narrated by Ibn Abbas where the Prophet, peace be upon him, sent Mu'adz to Yemen and said, 'Inform them that Allah has made Zakat obligatory upon them, to be taken from their rich and given to their poor.' This Hadith indicates the obligation of Zakat on wealth and its connection with religious obligation (Al-Bukhari, 2011).

Scholars all together agree on the obligation of Zakat, implying that if someone refuses to pay Zakat, it can be forcibly taken from their wealth."

The ruling on adhering to the eight categories mentioned in the verse for distribution

The jurists of the four schools of Islamic law agreed on the obligation of giving Zakat to the eight categories explicitly mentioned in the verse. They are the poor, the needy, those employed to administer it, reconciling hearts, freeing slaves, those in debt, in the cause of Allah, and wayfarers (An-Nawawi, 1991).

The 'poor' and 'needy' refer to those in dire need who either have nothing or have some, but it's insufficient. Scholars differ on which group is in greater need (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Presently, this category includes Muslim individuals without any wealth or income, or those with income/assets that do not exceed 50% of the sufficiency threshold for themselves and their families. The 'needy' encompasses Muslims whose income/assets are insufficient to cover more than 50% of their needs and those of their families but fall short of the sufficiency threshold (www.zakatselangor.com.my).

The 'those employed to administer it' are individuals tasked with collecting Zakat; their description doesn't necessitate being categorized as needy. They are entitled to distribute Zakat even if they are wealthy (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Presently, they are individuals appointed by His Majesty the Sultan to undertake the responsibilities of collecting and distributing Zakat (www.zakatselangor.com.my).

As for 'reconciling hearts,' they are those who have recently embraced Islam; they receive Zakat to strengthen their hearts in faith. Similarly, non-Muslims whose hearts can be inclined towards Islam or who can be convinced not to harm Muslims are also included (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Presently, it's worth noting that those 'reconciling hearts' receive Zakat for only five years (www.zakatselangor.com.my).

Those in bondage' refer to three categories: Muslim debtors seeking to free themselves from bondage, freeing a Muslim slave, and ransoming Muslim captives (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Presently, they encompass individuals living under authority or conditions that hinder them from living a better life, including the LGBTQ+ community, comprising homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgender individuals (www.zakatselangor.com.my).

Those in debt' refer to Muslims indebted to meet basic needs for themselves, their families, or for the betterment of the community but are unable to repay their debts (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Presently, it includes individuals in debt to finance fundamental needs like food,

medicine, education, protection, clothing, and transportation. Priority for this assistance is given to the poor, the needy, and those reconciling hearts (www.zakatselangor.com.my).

'In the cause of Allah' refers to Muslims who volunteer for jihad; they are given funds to spend on the needs of war and everything necessary for the affairs of jihad (Ibn Qudamah, 1968). Presently, it encompasses individuals or designated entities engaging in activities supporting the religion of Islam, its virtues, defending it, and spreading it, such as preachers, scholars, and students of knowledge (www.zakatselangor.com.my).

'Ibn Al-Sabil' refers to travelers who have been stranded due to a lack of funds while being away from their homelands (Qudamah, 1968). Presently, distributions for 'Ibn Al-Sabil' are allocated to those whose travel expenses are severed, such as released prisoners or rehabilitated drug addicts needing financial support to return home (www.zakatselangor.com.my).

The evidence from the Quran and Sunnah

First, the evidence from the Quran: Allah says in Surah At-Tawbah (9:60): 'Zakat expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect [zakat] and for bringing hearts together [for Islam] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and the cause of Allah and the [stranded] traveler - an obligation [imposed] by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise.'

The justification in this verse lies in the use of 'إِنَّمَا' (only/specifically), which serves to specify and exclude. The use of the definite article 'ال' (the) before the categories mentioned in the verse indicates the inclusivity of these specific categories and the exclusion of others. The intended meaning is that Zakat is designated for these groups exclusively, not for others. Hence, the verse explicitly points to the allocation of Zakat to these eight specific categories, excluding others (Kathir, 1999).

Secondly, the evidence from the Sunnah: Ziyad bin Al-Harith As-Suda'i reported: 'I came to the Messenger of Allah and pledged allegiance to him. Then, a man came and said, 'Grant me some of the charity (Sadaqah)!' The Messenger of Allah said to him: 'Indeed, Allah has not made the distribution of charity subject to the judgment of a prophet or anyone else. He has apportioned it into eight portions. If you are entitled to any of these portions, I will give it to you.' (Dawood, n.d)

This hadith implies that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not give the man from the charity just upon his request. Instead, he clarified that charity is not to be distributed arbitrarily but follows specific criteria. If the man was among the entitled recipients, he would receive, otherwise not.

The ruling on adhering to the eight categories mentioned in the verse in terms of distribution

The scholars unanimously agree that if only one category of Zakat recipients is found in the country where Zakat is being collected, then Zakat should be allocated to that specific category, ensuring fair distribution among individuals within that group (Al-Hattab, 1992).

However, there is a divergence of opinion regarding whether inclusivity is obligatory if all or most of the categories are present.

Their difference stems from the opposition between wording and interpretation in the Quranic verse: 'Zakat expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect [zakat] and for bringing hearts together [for Islam] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and the cause of Allah and the [stranded] traveler - an obligation [imposed] by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise' (Surah At-Tawbah, 60). The wording suggests the division among all categories, while the meaning indicates a preference for those in need. The intended purpose of Zakat was to alleviate hardship, so the enumeration of the eight categories in the verse was understood to distinguish these specific groups for Zakat without implying joint entitlement. The former is more apparent concerning wording, while the latter is more evident in terms of meaning" (Al-Hafid, 1975).

Their disagreement in this matter revolves around two opinions:

The first opinion holds that it's not obligatory to include all categories in Zakat; rather, it's permissible or preferable to focus on some specific categories, whether one or more. In other words, it suffices to include all categories or not include all of them by distributing Zakat to one eligible category among the eight mentioned for Zakat.

This viewpoint is held by the majority of scholars among the Hanafis, Malikis, Hanbalis, and the Shafi'is in opposition to the well-known opinion among them, attributed to Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Ali ibn Abi Talib, Ibn Abbas among the Companions, and the opinions of Saeed ibn Jubair, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, and Ibrahim An-Nakha'i among the Successors (Al-Kasani, 1986; Al-Hattab, 1992; Al-Mardawi, 2006).

They substantiate their opinion through the Quran, Sunnah, analogy, (*Qiyas*), and reasoning, citing:

1- Allah, the Exalted, said: "And if you disclose your charitable expenditures, they are good; but if you conceal them and give them to the poor, it is better for you" (Al-Baqarah, 2:271)
The basis of their argument: In this verse, Allah only mentions the poor, which indicates the non-obligation of inclusivity (Al-Najdi, 1976).

2 - Regarding the narration when the Prophet, peace be upon him, sent Mu'adz to Yemen: "Inform them that Allah has made the payment of Zakat obligatory upon them; it will be taken from their rich and given to their poor" (Al-Bukhari, 2001; Muslim, n.d).

The basis of their argument: This hadith mentions only one category, which is the poor, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, didn't specify other categories. This indicates the permissibility of giving Zakat to one specific category and the permissibility of giving it to one individual from that category (Al-Najdi, 1976).

3- Analogy is drawn from the entitlement of a group to intercede if they are absent, except for one person who takes the intercession, and if all categories are present, it is permissible to allocate it to one specific category (Al-Qarafi, 1994).

4- It is permissible for the leader (*Imam*) to allocate the charity of an individual to one specific category. Similarly, it's permissible for the owner of wealth to allocate it to the person to whom the leader allocates it, as the leader stands in the same position regarding management (Al-Quduri, 2006).

The second opinion states that it's obligatory to include all categories of Zakat available in the land of collection if it's feasible. If some categories are missing, the responsibility falls upon those present, with the obligation to reconcile among themselves.

This viewpoint is held by the majority of Shafi'i jurists as their popular and accepted opinion, as well as the other narration from Imam Ahmad. It is also favored by notable scholars among the Maliki jurists such as Asbagh and Dawud Al-Zahiri. This opinion aligns with the views of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, Ikrimah, and Ibn Shihab Al-Zuhri among the Successors (Al-Khurashi, Al-Nawawi, Al-Ramli, 1984, Muflih, 2003).

They supported their opinion through the Quran, Sunnah, and reasoning citing

1- Allah, the Exalted, said: "Zakat expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy." (At-Tawbah, 9:60)

Basis of their argument: This verse indicates that Zakat is mandated by Allah, as emphasized by the phrase "an obligation [imposed] by Allah." Hence, it implies the obligation to distribute Zakat according to how Allah has ordained it, even if not all categories are present, as it is given to those who qualify based on their presence.

2- The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Allah did not accept the judgment of a prophet or anyone else regarding charity until He decreed it. He allotted it into eight shares, so if you belong to those shares, I have given you your due" (Dawud, n.d)

Basis of their argument: The apparent meaning of the hadith indicates the obligation to include the eight categories of Zakat. This is because Allah included all of them in Zakat, and there is no allowance to deprive some individuals of it, unlike if someone bequeaths or acknowledges a specific portion for Zayd, Amr, or Bakr (Al-Khatib Al-Shirbini, 1994 & Al-Ramli, 1984).

3- It is impermissible for the Imam (leader) to limit Zakat to only some of its purposes because inclusivity is not difficult for him (Al-Nawawi, 1991).

The Preferred Opinion

Based on the various statements of the jurists regarding the inclusivity of all Zakat categories and the evidence provided by proponents of each view, is to opt for the first opinion. This view allows giving Zakat to only one category of eligible recipients, or even narrowing it down to one individual from that category, though inclusivity is preferable when possible.

This Choice is Influenced by Several Factors

1- The strength of their evidence derived from the Quranic verses and Hadiths.

2- Emulating the actions of Mu'adz, who was a prominent companion, acting as a representative in Yemen, and his administration of collecting and distributing Zakat at that time, resembling the structure of Zakat institutions.

3- Acknowledging that enforcing inclusivity might pose difficulty in certain times and regions, making it burdensome.

4- Recognizing that attempting to encompass all categories might not always fulfill all objectives of Zakat, such as achieving sufficiency, particularly in regions where the collected Zakat funds might be limited, especially when adhering to a specific geographical scope, as advocated by some.

Conclusion

Here is a summary of the most important findings of the research:

1- Islamic Sharia has defined the channels of Zakat in a manner suitable for all eras and regions, making them applicable at every time and place.

2- Limiting the Zakat categories to the eight mentioned in the verse does not indicate rigidity in jurisprudence but allows flexibility to include beneficiaries who resemble or are closely related to these categories in a way that does not contradict the Quranic text.

3- The non-compulsion to encompass all eight categories in Zakat distribution aligns with the contemporary circumstances and the needs of the beneficiaries, supported by various modern-day religious decrees.

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