

The “Hisbah” System as a Mechanism of Social Control Enforcing Moral and Religious Standards and Stabilizing Central Administration in Medieval Society

Md. Abu Zafar¹, Abdul Momen²

¹Mufassir (Assistant Professor) Al-Gajjali Islamia Kamil Madrasah Bhandaria, Pirojpur. Borishal, Bangladesh.

²Associate professor, Dept. of Islamic History and Culture, Jagannath University, Dhaka, and Ph.D., UTM, Malaysia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100700724>

Received: 28 July 2026; Accepted: 03 August 2026; Published: 11 August 2026

ABSTRACT

The article examines the origins, functions, and societal effects of the Hisbah system in Islamic governance, highlighting its role in fostering virtue and curbing vice as prescribed by the Holy Quran. Founded on the Islamic imperative for accountability and ethical governance, Hisbah was established as a state organization to supervise the enforcement of moral and socio-economic mandates within society. The *Muhtasib*, the principal official, played a crucial role in enforcing market norms, upholding ethical standards, and eradicating corrupt activities. The study aims to elucidate the historical and practical importance of the Hisbah system within contemporary administrative frameworks. The study's problem: Despite its significant historical importance, the contributions of the Hisbah system to socio-economic and moral control are insufficiently examined in current scholarship, resulting in an unsatisfactory assessment of its significance in contemporary society. The study's objectives are to delineate the institutional history of Hisbah, scrutinize its fundamental functions, and assess its impact on upholding the public interest and societal cohesion within the Islamic government. The study utilized a qualitative methodology, incorporating a historical examination of Islamic administrative texts, socio-economic records, and classical jurisprudential sources to examine the development and influence of the Hisbah system. The study's findings indicate that Hisbah significantly contributed to market oversight, the prevention of monopolies, and the protection of societal ethics. Its functions encompassed the standardization of products, the eradication of fraud, and the preservation of public welfare, highlighting its significance as a fundamental aspect of Islamic government. The study indicates that the Hisbah institution substantially enhanced socio-economic stability and ethical governance, demonstrating its viability as a model for modern administrative methods. The study's implications reveal that comprehending the principles and processes of the Hisbah system provides significant insights into contemporary governance frameworks, especially in promoting ethical administration, market integrity, and societal welfare. This study illuminates Hisbah's persistent significance as an institution that embodies the convergence of ethics and administration in Islamic government.

Keywords: Hisbah System, Muhtasib, Muslim Governance, Market Regulation, Ethical and Moral Principles, Quality Control, Islamic Administration

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic administration successfully led the globe century after century by effectively establishing a system intended to maintain human dignity through fully realising individual rights. As a result, ensuring these rights is essential for encouraging development and preserving human dignity. Islamic administrators are responsible for safeguarding and advancing the well-being of all citizens under their jurisdiction. To meet this obligation, Islamic administrations initiated the establishment of a variety of institutions committed to the protection and enforcement of human rights as well as the resolution of social issues. The Hisbah was one of the most notable institutions because it was crucial in settling societal conflicts and addressing concerns such as moral

degradation, market mismanagement, economic imbalance, gambling, and other social vices. It was also one of the institutions that played a critical part in addressing these issues. One of the most essential components of the Islamic administrative system was the Hisbah, which was intended to protect justice, prohibit injustice, and punish those who committed mistakes. To protect the rights of the poor against the exploitation of the wealthy and the weak against the powerful, it served as a protector of public morality and a guarantee for the rights of the poor. This organisation's principal goals were the upkeep of public order and the realisation of justice within society. The guy who was responsible for overseeing the functioning of this organisation, known as the Muhtasib, was an exceptionally qualified individual. This study investigates the beginnings and development of the Hisbah within the framework of Islamic administration. Further, it highlights the essential role that the Hisbah plays in protecting, restoring, and enforcing citizens' rights within society.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology to examine the historical development and societal contributions of the Hisbah system in Islamic governance. Through an in-depth investigation of primary and secondary sources, the research attempts to deliver a comprehensive understanding of the Hisbah system's development and function within Muslim society. The inquiry includes a thorough analysis of texts, a survey of pertinent literature, and the integration of observable observations to provide a comprehensive viewpoint.

Aims of the Study

This study focuses on its fundamental significance in promoting moral governance, socioeconomic stability, and public welfare. It investigates the historical, functional, and sociological aspects of the Hisbah system within the Islamic government. By fulfilling these goals, the study advances knowledge of the Hisbah institution as a pillar of Islamic administration and provides insights into its applicability and significance in modern society.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretically strong analysis of Hisbah should rely on various intellectual traditions of social control, governance and public administration as well as Islamic political thought to shed light on the role of Hisbah as an instrument of moral and economic regulation in addition to the internal tensions and limitations of this institution.

The Social Control Theory

Émile Durkheim's concepts of social solidarity and collective conscience are well suited to be used in an analysis of the Hisbah system. Durkheim saw religion as a "social glue" that helps to strengthen social cohesion by providing a set of norms and values that unites communities.¹ This collective conscience was concretized in the Hisbah, an institution which is a component of Islamic governance and the one whose job is to "enjoin good and forbid evil" (*amr bi al-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*).² The Muhtasib (market inspector), was more than a mere enforcer of law, a keeper of law, he was a tool of this collective conscience, and he had to foster and shape the moral structure of society. A Durkheimian view of the Hisbah would focus on its need to ensure mechanical solidarity of the society, in which religious and social identities were closely intertwined, and its role in the regulation of public morality, as necessary for the stability of the society.³

The theory of authority and rationalization by Max Weber can be used to complement this view. Weber found three forms of legitimate authority: traditional, charismatic and legal-rational. The Hisbah was a representation of the clash between traditional and legal-rational authority, especially when it became institutionalized as a State office, from a voluntary religious obligation (*fard kifayah*).⁴ Ibn Khaldun understood that this had changed and that the role of the Hisbah had been over taken by the government's administrative system.⁵ The institution was a manifestation of the progressive rationalization of Islamic governance described by Weber, from charismatic or traditional to being based on manuals, procedures and formal appointment procedures. The creation of treatises on the development of hisbah from the ninth to the fourteenth century C.E. that set out to describe the duties and procedures of the Muhtasib is a good example of this rationalization.⁶ Not only were these treatises

the standardization of market regulation, but the moral and behavioral codes to be observed were also included, making religious duty the administrative practice.

Perhaps the most penetrating analysis of the operation of the Hisbah and possible ways in which it can be misused are those of Foucault, with his notions of power-knowledge and disciplinary mechanisms. But Foucault contended that power is not simply repressive; it is productive, that is, it makes knowledge, it forms subjects, it regulates populations by surveillance, by normalization. Hisbah, a system of moral control, operated as a disciplinary system which controlled economic activity and individual conduct.⁷ The Muhtasib acted on a logic which Foucault might call 'panoptic' because his presence in the marketplace led to an atmosphere of constant observation, and thus the self-regulation of market participants in the absence of the Muhtasib. The institution's concern with public space - markets, streets and mosques - is based on Foucault's notion of the spatial regulation and visibility of the modern state. The Hisbah, however, also shows the dangers Foucault described within the disciplinary power: that disciplinary power can be excessive, it can be selective, and there is the risk of moralizing and confusing disciplinary power with state power. The Muhtasib's right to punish without any formal court (*ta'zir*) is typical example of what Foucault called "disciplinary power"-a power that is exercised through surveillance, normalization and correction, as opposed to legal procedures.⁸

Governance and Public Administration Theory

The Hisbah was an early instance of "regulatory governance" from a public administration point of view, in which the regulatory role of the market was combined with a moral regulatory role. The dual role of the institution - as a regulator of economic activities and as an enforcer of public morality - is a good example to show the interdependence of economic and moral governance in pre-modern Islamic societies. In addition to ensuring religious correctness, he was also responsible for overseeing weights and measures, preventing cheating, fostering honest pricing and the absence of monopolistic practices.⁹ This integration mirrors that of the pre-modern governance which governance theorists describe as 'holistic', in which economic regulation and moral/social order are intertwined.

The Hisbah is also a classic example of what some public administration scholars refer to as "street-level bureaucracy," where the day-to-day implementation of policy is done at the grassroots level, and the officials there have a high degree of discretion in policy interpretation and application.¹⁰ The Muhtasib was quite independent in his decision regarding *ma'ruf* (good) and *munkar* (evil) in specific situations, and was able to decide penalties. This flexibility and sensitivity to context, however, also opened the door to vulnerability to abuse and inconsistencies: the personal interpretation and bias of the Muhtasib could influence enforcement patterns.¹¹ This was the subject of the treatises, which tried to provide specific duties and standards, but the ambiguity in moral judgement persisted.

Islamic Political Thought and Religious Authority

The Hisbah explores the intricate connection between religion and state in Islamic governance, by engaging in modern debates in Islamic political theory. Beginning with the Islamic concept of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, "the command by the good and the prohibition of the bad," the institution is grounded in an Islamic principle that is a collective responsibility of the Muslim community, and to which the state can be delegated, according to Ibn Taymiyyah.¹² This delegation poses basic questions of the extent of state authority in relation to morality and the connection between religious obligation and political authority.

Hisbah is an example of how voluntary religious duty can transform into state obligation; a tension inherent in Islamic political theory between the obligations of the community and the authority of the state. The roles of the Muhtasib were discussed by the classical jurists and they highlighted the importance of knowledge, leniency, patience, good character and being answerable to a higher authority.¹³ But, such protections have failed to stop abuse in practice when political circumstances redoubled the urge for central control or when it became a vehicle for the legitimization of the state.

The concept of social transformation can be nuanced using Murtadha Muthahhari's framework, which helps understand the role of Hisbah in more detail. In response to the work of Durkheim's functionalism and Weber's

economic determinism, Muthahhari introduced a four layered model of social being: Individual consciousness, intersubjective relation, institutionalization of values and collective reflection. It influenced individual moral awareness, interpersonal relationships, institutionalization of moral values and collective reflection on collective social norms through its enforcing actions at all four levels. This concept implies that the Hisbah was not only a tool of social control, but also served as a way for continuous moral and ethical development in Islamic society.¹⁴

Incorporating Classical Analysis and Modern Analysis

This theoretical framework proposed here allows us to consider the Hisbah as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that, at the same time, functioned as a system of social control, as a framework of governance regulation, and as a representation of Islamic political theology. The Durkheimian approach highlights its function in sustaining social cohesion and the collective norm; the Weberian approach shows its institutional development and rationalization; the Foucauldian approach brings into focus its disciplinary functions and possibilities of misuses; and Islamic political thought offers normative and theological background to grasp the field's legitimacy and restrictions.

This holistic perspective allows the reader to critically evaluate the historical use of the Hisbah and to participate in current discussions on Islamic governance and the possibility of its compatibility with the modern pluralistic society. The theoretical principles of social control theory offer insight into how the Hisbah was effective at creating social order, as well as the challenges that emerged when social control for religious and moral reasons were implemented in different pluralistic settings. The analysis draws from these various theoretical streams to situate the Hisbah within the broader scholarly conversation about governance, morality and power, and to enrich the understanding of the historical role and significance of Islamic governance and the contemporary relevance of the concept of Hisbah.

Hijbah and Muhtasib

The word “Hisbah,” which means “arithmetical problem,” sum, “or “reward,” comes from the Arabic root *ha.sen.ba*. It indicates “to compute” or “to measure” when used as a verb. *Ihtasaba*, which translates to “to consider” or “to anticipate a reward in the Hereafter by adding a virtuous deed to one’s account with Allah,” is closely related. In order to encourage others to do good (*ma’ruf*) and discourage evil (*munkar*) in the hopes of receiving rewards in the Hereafter, the Muslim noun form *Ihtisab* came to represent the actions of the Muhtasib.¹⁵ The Muhtasib was in charge of managing the activities of the Hisbah institution, which was tasked with maintaining public values and norms in several areas, such as social, political, economic, and religious issues.¹⁶

Eventually, the name “Hisbah” developed into an institutional structure that symbolized a state mechanism created by the Qur’an to uphold virtue and prohibit vice (*amr bil ma’ruf wa-n-nahi’ anil munkar*).¹⁷ By divine law, this institution was charged with defending society against moral and ethical deviation, preserving the faith, and guaranteeing the populace’s well-being in both spiritual and material spheres. By designating people to enforce what is proper when ignored and prohibit what is wrong when practised, the Hisbah achieved its goal.¹⁸ The Qur’an, which exhorts people to live moral lives and serve as role models for others, is the fundamental source of the Hisbah as a quality control system. The Qur’an, for example, says: “Despite having studied the text, do you still command others to be religious while ignoring yourself? Are you not understanding?” (al Quran, 2:44) Developed as a management and quality control system in Islamic cultures, the Hisbah is an institutional mission founded on faith. Its main goal was to uphold integrity and accountability while preventing corruption, deviance, and illegal activity in society.

Often called a “market inspector,” the Muhtasib, the institution’s head, served as an inspector of public conduct and areas. However, the Muhtasib’s duties went beyond the marketplace; they also included upholding the law and ensuring that Islamic values were followed in public life. To make Islamic law clearly visible and enforceable in day-to-day life, the Muhtasib patrolled public locations and dealt with infractions, guided by the mandate to “command what is right and forbid what is wrong.”¹⁹ The Muhtasib, who was directly appointed by the state ruler, served as an impartial inspector with extensive power to monitor state agencies’ performance and

employees across various industries. If their objectives matched their deeds, they had the authority to take disciplinary action when needed. The Muhtasib were supposed to act honourably and abstain from pursuing self-serving goals to prevent conflict or misuse of power.²⁰ This function was essential to preserving society's moral and ethical foundation.

The Muhtasib was required to possess various intellectual, spiritual, and personal attributes that would allow him to successfully carry out the duties of the Hisbah institution. He had to be an adult male and Muslim. Technically qualified deputies helped him investigate different crafts and trades issues. In their own fields of competence, the Muhtasib and his deputies both offered professional guidance. Although the Muhtasib had extensive authority, he was required to use it responsibly and maturely. The Muhtasib's credentials highlighted his moral and intellectual rectitude. He had to demonstrate a high degree of maturity and thoroughly comprehend Shari'ah, or Islamic law. The Muhtasib needed to be proficient in Islamic law, or Fiqh, to understand, interpret, and apply legal principles correctly. However, knowledge was not enough; in order to guarantee the proper execution of these regulations, the Muhtasib also needed to have a deep dread of Allah (Taqwa).²¹

Abdul Rahman al-Shizri listed the following requirements for a Muhtasib, which were accepted by Islamic jurists (fuqaha):

- being a responsible adult Muslim who has a reputation for fairness.
- Displaying a comprehensive understanding of Islamic law, including its goals and rules, and a strong religious commitment.
- Keeping a good reputation in the community and closely following Sunnah.
- Acting without hypocrisy and indeed for Allah's sake.
- Ensuring that there are no conflicts between his words and deeds.
- Staying incorruptible and refusing to accept gifts from companies or sectors he oversees.²²

The Muhtasib's job required a blend of religious commitment, technical expertise, and moral character. He had to be a devout Muslim who understood the difference between right and wrong in society. His ultimate goal, driven by a profound feeling of responsibility and a fear of divine wrath, was to serve Allah. Since Muhtasib's capacity to carry out his responsibilities rested on the confidence and respect he enjoyed, his reputation in the community had to be impeccable. The Muhtasib's greatest attribute was honesty. Since this job requires knowledge and a strong moral and spiritual commitment to upholding justice and fairness in society, an unqualified person cannot perform their obligations efficiently.

Power Abuse and Limitations

The role of Hisbah in Islamic government has historically been a powerful way to ensure good conduct in society and to control trade, but a proper study of it must be contextualized with the potential for misuse, uneven application, and the competing moral consequences and individual freedoms that accompany its existence. Historical records show that the Muhtasib was granted wide discretionary powers that would include the ability to administer certain forms of ta'zir without a judge's intervention, which could easily be abused into arbitrary applications of punishment, such as flogging or public humiliation. From the very beginning, when the office was established, the weakness of the Muhtasib to corruption and misuse was noted in the case of Yahya ibn Zakariyyah, who was executed in 791 C.E. for defrauding the public of Caliph al-Mansur.²³ Further evidence of overreach comes from an analysis of the history of the interregnum between the Ilkhanate and Timurid empires that indicates that the Muhtasib became a symbol of hypocrisy and state control, with the institution becoming ineffective because of the variety of its functions and the fact that the officers were not independent and were viewed as enforcers of the state's will rather than moral enforcers. The essential qualification for a Muhtasib was that he be of good moral character, which was subjective and hard to enforce, and therefore could be seen as one who was able to read into his authority a personal or politically driven agenda.²⁴ Furthermore, the use of juristic opinions, sometimes different and even conflicting, resulted in the possibility of selective enforcement, depending on the Muhtasib's interpretation of the law and the context of enforcement, which was likely to lead to inconsistency and injustice.

This history of potential misuse has been amplified by current uses and applications, and reflects the many tensions that exist between the goals of the Hisbah and pluralistic values today. In Northern Nigeria, the Kano State Hisbah Corps has been reported to have exceeded its statutory powers and that its ‘patrols’ resulted in arbitrary arrests, harassment and property destruction, particularly of vulnerable groups, non-Muslims and further contravening constitutional freedoms of religion and personal liberty in a secular state.²⁵ Similarly, the Taliban’s “Law on Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice” in Afghanistan shows the extent of institutionalized abuse; it redefines the modern police role into a religious policing apparatus that has virtually unlimited power over the vast majority of public and private activity, runs without legal restrictions and is only accountable to the supreme religious official. This concentration of power has been condemned as fostering a climate of fear, leading to the effectively “imprisonment” of citizens, especially women, and destroying modern policing institutions that have been established over 20 years.²⁶ The following contemporary examples, along with historical precedents, show the main argument that in a system of enforcing one specific interpretation of morality without any strong, independent protections, it is inevitable that it will conflict with the principles of individual autonomy and legal pluralism that exist in diverse modern societies.

Classical Islamic jurisprudence did, however, provide some protections such as the Muhtasib’s oath of office and the personal moral standards that must be met by the Muhtasib, along with theoretical controls by a higher authority such as the governor (amir) or chief judge (qadi).²⁷ The historical record and contemporary evidence, however, reveals that such was often not the case and these were not always enough to stop abuse. The Muhtasib’s special authority to act without a complaint and to rule according to moral laws was what rendered him a powerful state actor, and although a *qadi* or *wali al-mazhalim* could have appealed to a higher authority, this was not always the case, as higher powers were also part of the state sphere and were not always willing or able to control it.²⁸ The role of the Muhtasib was to implement the law, and not interpret it, and he needed less *ijtihad*, but also was more reliant on the political and religious climate.²⁹ In the end, the institutional structure had checks in it, but their operation relied to a large extent on the integrity of those who enjoyed the power and the political culture, with the potential to be undermined by the very weaknesses that it was intended to address. Thus, understanding the Hisbah should take into account the fact that it wasn’t a unified entity, but rather was a multifaceted and sometimes combative institution with a role in maintaining social order, always accompanied by its potential to be a device for moral authoritarianism.

The Development and Evolution of Hisbah

The Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad’s (SAW) Sunnah serve as the foundation for the Islamic institution of Hisbah. It is based on the following Qur’anic command: “Let there be a nation among you that forbids indecency, encourages kindness, and invites to the good.” (al Quran, 3:104) The foundation of the Hisbah institution is this verse. Al-Mawardi goes on to say that Hisbah was one of the guiding tenets of religious matters and that it began with the arrival of Islam. Because of its many advantages and spiritual rewards, the Imams frequently took on the duty of Hisbah personally during the early Islamic era.³⁰ The idea of Hisbah evolved into a formal organization responsible for monitoring people’s social, political, and economic behaviour inside an Islamic state. The Qur’anic commandment is also connected to its origin: “Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.” (al Quran, 3:110) Prophet Muhammad stressed the significance of prohibiting evil and enjoining virtue in order to uphold these directives. He cautioned his supporters: “If some people commit sins, and there are others among them who can prohibit them but do not, soon Allah’s punishment will fall on all of them.”³¹ Prophet Muhammad served as an example by personally upholding and practising the tenets of Hisbah. As the Islamic empire grew, he actively put its principles into practice and designated particular people to perform its tasks. In Islamic history, he is considered the first Muhtasib. Following the Prophet’s death, the Caliphs took over Hisbah’s responsibilities personally or through duly nominated representatives. Hisbah developed by absorbing elements of the pre-existing civil institutions in the areas it had conquered as the Islamic empire grew.³² As a result, it became a distinct Islamic institution and an independent office. The term Muhtasib was officially recognized during the Abbasid era, and it was supposedly first used during the reign of Caliph al-Mahdi (d. 786 CE). As Muhtasib’s position became more significant over time, comprehensive publications that outlined the institution’s duties, practices, and scope arose.³³

The Hisbah institution accompanied Muslims into North Africa (1250-1517 CE) and Spain (710-1492), and it continued to play a crucial role in government long after the Baghdad Caliphate broke up. It was important during the Ayyubid (1171-1260 CE) and Fatimid (909-1171) eras.³⁴ The Muhtasib was mainly considered a market inspector during the Ottoman Empire (1300-1924 CE), but his responsibilities went well beyond this.³⁵ The Muhtasib's tasks, which included monitoring public morality, guaranteeing adherence to religious obligations, and dealing with misbehaviour in public and sacred areas, were established by the *Ihtisab Kanunnameleri*. In addition, the Muhtasib enforced laws to differentiate Muslims from non-Muslims kept an eye on the humane treatment of enslaved people and animals and supervised guilds and trades to stop unethical behaviour.³⁶ The Hisbah continued operating in several Islamic kingdoms and empires, especially in Persia, even after the Abbasid Caliphate disintegrated. Up to the 19th century, it was still an essential institution. The Muhtasib's principal responsibilities included upholding community welfare, monitoring market activity, enforcing Muslim religious duties, and guaranteeing public morals.³⁷ The institution's commitment to justice and social harmony was reflected in its authority to punish criminals quickly.

The institution of Hisbah persisted during the Ilkhani era (1256-1335 CE) and was frequently revived following the Ilkhans' conversion to Islam. For example, under the guidance of the Muhtasib, Ghazan Khan (1295-1304) standardized weights and measures throughout his realm, guaranteeing uniformity and equity in trade. The function of the Muhtasib and the credentials needed for it were quite similar to those of the Seljuk period during the Timurid dynasty (1369-1506 CE).³⁸ Muhtasibs were assigned to important cities during the Safavid era (1502-1736 CE). They carried out customary tasks while adhering to Twelver Shi'a orthodoxy. To regulate fair trading practices, such as controlling guilds and setting prices, the *Muhtasib al-Mumalik*, the kingdom's top Muhtasib, selected delegates.³⁹

During the Sultanate era in India (1206-1526 CE), the Hisbah institution became a crucial component of Muslim governance in the Indian subcontinent. Muhtasibs and Qadis were appointed wherever Muslim power was established. Recognizing the value of an effective Hisbah department, Sultan Balban (1266-1287 CE) gave it a top priority to be established, even in tiny cities, to ensure excellent government. The Muhtasib's duties included upholding Sharia law, controlling trade, and enforcing public decency.⁴⁰ While Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316 CE) concentrated on price control, the repression of social vices like drinking and gambling, and upholding public morals, Firuz Shah Tughlaq (1351-1388 CE) outlawed many activities he considered irreligious. Similarly, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq (1325-1351 CE) directly enforced Hisbah ideals and even questioned people about their comprehension of Islamic beliefs. The Muhtasib rose to prominence and dignity during his rule.⁴¹ Sher Shah Suri (1540-1554 CE) upheld a robust administrative Hisbah system, but the organization started to deteriorate following his rule. For political and personal reasons, the Mughal emperors failed to bring it back to life, which resulted in a significant defeat. The Kotwal, who had a smaller jurisdiction and less emphasis on moral and religious policing, took over the Muhtasib's duties instead.⁴² Among the Mughals, Aurangzeb (1658-1707 CE) was an anomaly. He brought Hisbah back to life and rigorously enforced it. His legal codes included punishments for crimes like drug and alcohol abuse. Notwithstanding his efforts, Muslims' religious and moral well-being, as well as their larger social and cultural life, suffered throughout the Mughal era due to the general demise of the Hisbah institution.⁴³ Although its importance and use differed across dynasties, the Hisbah institution remained crucial to government and moral supervision throughout Islamic history. It left a lasting history as a pillar of Islamic governance, even though it eventually declined in some areas.

The Hisbah Institution's Role in Muslim Governance

In Muslim administration, the Hisbah institution has two functions. In the first place, it covers broad duties, such as describing the responsibilities and values of the Muhtasib (market supervisor) and the judicial and religious facets of their position. Second, it covers technical and practical duties, including overseeing trades and crafts, imposing administrative control over different professions, and guaranteeing standards and quality of products. In the past, both in Islamic history and the more extensive history of human government, the Hisbah institution has been crucial in upholding social norms, regulating markets, and advancing moral principles.⁴⁴

Religious Supervision and Upholding of Islamic Obligations

One of the primary responsibilities of the Hisbah institution is maintaining the integrity of the Islamic religion by ensuring that Islamic practices are appropriately organized and facilitated. The Muhtasib also oversees mosque upkeep, selects imams, and plans daily prayers, Friday congregations, and Eid prayers. By preaching, counselling, reprimanding, or sending instances to higher authorities, the institution tackles social infractions and enforces conformity to Shari'ah's responsibilities.⁴⁵ The Hisbah is essential to maintaining Islam's uniqueness and deterring immoral behaviour. It keeps an eye on instructors and preachers to make sure that Islamic teachings are not misunderstood and punishes violators as needed. The Hisbah keeps an eye on non-Muslims' religious activities to avoid social unrest and to make sure the conditions set during conquests are followed, even if it does not meddle in their religious activities. Additionally, it emphasizes moral integrity and communal peace while holding Muslims accountable for their vows. These duties are still essential in contemporary cultures where moral principles and religious activities are frequently eclipsed by secular issues, underscoring the Hisbah's ongoing value.⁴⁶

Monitoring of Mosques

The Hisbah institution is responsible for overseeing mosque maintenance and ensuring they stay clean and in good shape for their sacredness. To prevent misuse of mosque spaces, mosque attendants are ordered to seal the doors after prayer times. This involves preventing boys, people with mental problems, and others who are engaged in improper activities-like eating, sleeping, creating, or trading-from entering the mosque. Furthermore, it is highly forbidden to conduct worldly conversations, look for stray animals, or debate secular topics in mosques. These rules demonstrate the institution's dedication to upholding the sanctity of places of worship.⁴⁷ The Hisbah institution's lasting significance stems from its all-encompassing strategy for maintaining religious observance, moral behaviour, and social harmony. It serves as an example of administration based on ethical and spiritual principles.

The Hisbah Institution's Function in Maintaining Market Regulation and Justice

Ensuring justice and equity in society, especially in economic operations, was one of the primary responsibilities of the Hisbah organization. In order to reduce exploitation and stop behaviours like price manipulation, monopolistic collaboration, and supply and production imbalances, this required encouraging fair play among economic partners. In the past, the Hisbah institution performed a number of vital market-related tasks that can be summed up as follows:

Fostering Ethical and Moral Principles in Marketplaces

The Hisbah institution ensured that everyone involved in the market conducted business according to moral and ethical principles. This includes treating apprentices somewhat, being open and honest about the qualities of products, and treating animals humanely by avoiding overwork or mistreatment.

Supervision of the Market

The Hisbah oversaw market transactions to guarantee adherence to moral agreements that forbade dishonesty and fraud. It upheld supervision to ensure that all transactions complied with the standards of justice and fairness.⁴⁸

Market and Commerce Oversight

Hisbah regulated markets, streets, money, scales, and all kinds of weights and measurements. It monitored pricing, monopolies, and sales tactics. Along with individuals engaged in livestock, fisheries, and sausage production, it also managed the food and beverage industries, which included millers, bakers, butchers, restaurants, and crop merchants.

Product Quality Control

One of Hisbah's primary responsibilities was upholding quality standards for all products. To protect customers' interests, products were routinely examined to ensure they fulfilled social norms.⁴⁹

Making Sure the Market is Healthy

The organization aimed to foster a favourable market environment by prohibiting retailers from encroaching on public areas, such as the streets outside their stores, which would violate pedestrian rights. To minimize disturbance to the community, craftspeople who made noise had to work far from residential and commercial areas.⁵⁰

Standards for Health and Hygiene

The Hisbah supervised market health regulations. It ensured that food makers followed hygienic guidelines, which included utilizing clean products, preventing food contamination, and keeping production areas hygienic. For example, bakers and meat vendors had to cover their lips, noses, and hair while working, and the hygiene of the premises was checked.⁵²

Avoiding Monopolies and Controlling Costs

The Hisbah made a concerted effort to stop monopolistic behaviour. It looked for covert agreements between producers to control supply by hoarding commodities or raising prices. Pricing enforcement was used as a corrective mechanism in times of monopolistic activity, adhering to the ideas put forward by academics such as Ibn Taymiyyah.⁵²

Market Dispute Arbitration

The organization served as an arbitrator to settle market disputes. The Hisbah provided quick, frequently on-the-spot settlements to disputes between merchants, buyers, and sellers or between employers and employees to prevent drawn-out legal proceedings. The Muhtasib, special committees, or their subordinates conducted the arbitrations.⁵³

Public Utility Service Oversight

Roads, bridges, lamps, water fountains, public baths, drainage systems, and other public amenities were all under the Hisbah's supervision and upkeep. It coordinated with the municipal or federal governments to guarantee prompt repairs and maintenance when necessary. In the absence of funding, the organization looked to wealthy people for donations to support public works projects.

Examining and Maintaining Infrastructure and Public Health

The Hisbah conducted routine town inspections to maintain sanitary conditions and, when required, assisted with sewage and trash clearance. To ensure adherence to safety and quality requirements, it also monitored the state of roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, and building projects. This involved monitoring public buildings and water supply systems to maintain the minimal standards necessary for the general welfare.⁵⁴

Control of Clothes and Textiles

The Hisbah oversaw the manufacturing of textiles, clothing, tailors, cotton merchants, thread manufacturers, fabric dyers, and shoemakers in the apparel industry. The Hisbah monitored traders in gold and silver, currency changers, jewellers, tile dealers, and other financial transactions.

Rules for Architecture

An important factor in architectural oversight was the Hisbah. It forbade the building of minarets and mosques that would interfere with Islamic rituals unless the Imam approved. Minarets could not be erected too close to the muezzin to ensure that the muezzin could not miss private homes when calling believers to prayer. Traditions ascribed to ‘Hazrat Ali (R.) state that minarets were to be as tall as mosque roofs and that any openings that overlooked neighbouring residences had to be blocked. Unnecessary architectural additions, especially those made after the Prophet Muhammad and the Rashidun caliphs, were also prohibited. The Muhtasib was charged with employing qualified builders for upkeep to guarantee that the right repairs were done. He used public cash to preserve public structures and amenities in his capacity as a custodian of public rights. The Muhtasib successfully protected public interests and morals by conducting thorough inspections. He had no control over the structures’ architectural beauty, nevertheless. He was in charge of outlawing elaborate decorations and wall paintings in secular and religious buildings. Builders also needed the right equipment, such as angles, weights, and lines, to ensure that structures were carried out accurately and without deviating from vertical alignment.⁵⁵

The Hisbah institution was created to support society by utilizing all available resources for Islam and ensuring that all community members could use the systems efficiently. It maintained public safety and order and safeguarded vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, the disabled, the impoverished, and the homeless. Hisbah’s duties included addressing religious issues, civil rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights.⁵⁶ Essentially, it oversaw all facets of society, including morality, ethics, social order, and monetary equilibrium, and it made sure that civil life ran well in urban areas. Within Muslim governance systems, the Hisbah functioned similarly to other departments in terms of administrative structure. The functions of *Qadi* (judge) and Muhtasib were occasionally combined, and occasionally, the *Shurta* (police) was also under the Muhtasib’s authority. However, each position continued to perform specific duties: a *Shurta* handled violations requiring police intervention, a *Qadi* handled complaints by investigating veracity, and a Muhtasib took action based on the facts without waiting for complaints. The essence of Hisbah is still essential today, despite the fact that it is frequently disregarded in historical accounts as a distinctive contribution of Muslim civilization meant to facilitate prayer and improve everyday life, particularly in terms of economic concord.⁵⁷ The necessity for an organization that is in line with modern moral standards is evident, even though the values of many Muslim nations have been weakened or secularized as a result of political shifts over time-Saudi Arabia being an example.⁵⁸ A contemporary version of the Muhtasib might be a valuable model for meeting the societal demands of Muslim communities today, even though the idea of an Ombudsman has surfaced in some Western contexts as a counterpart. The text is still informative but is arranged into several sections in this iteration.⁵⁹

The following crucial elements are highlighted in the discussion of the roles played by the Hisbah institution and its leadership:

Firstly, in the institutional leadership, the Hisbah institution was led by the Muhtasib. He had to be a free Muslim with exceptional moral character, wisdom, and social status. Along with an awareness of societal norms and practices, a Muhtasib was supposed to have extensive knowledge of Sharia, which frequently qualified them for *Ijtihad*. Kindness, patience, honesty, and the capacity to lead others toward righteousness were critical personal qualities. The Muhtasib took an oath to uphold Islamic principles, ethics, and standards and were subject to a code of ethics.

Secondly, in the religious duties, the Muhtasib was primarily responsible for ensuring Islamic Sharia was applied in both public and private spheres. This involved dealing with infractions, settling conflicts between religions, and preserving Islam’s integrity in Muslims’ daily lives. Misunderstandings of Islam were rigorously addressed, and remedial action was taken where required. Through these initiatives, the organization helped to preserve social harmony and ecclesiastical order.

Thirdly, in encouraging social order, the Hisbah institution was essential in bringing peace and order to all facets of human existence. In addition to monitoring business transactions to prevent fraud and regulating weights and measures to promote fairness, it enforced the ideal of enjoining virtue and forbidding evil. Corruption was suppressed, public immorality was discouraged, and the sale of alcohol was prohibited close to graves, mosques, and other important sites.

Fourthly, in economic oversight, the organization played a key role in promoting a system of monetary equilibrium. It sought to supervise the efficient use of labor, oversee credit arrangements, control pricing, guarantee ownership rights, and regulate supply. The institution aimed to safeguard society's interests by stepping in when strong people or organizations were manipulating the economy. Its economic operations could be modified to fit contemporary trade, distribution, and manufacturing systems.

Fifthly, in municipal services, in Muslim civilization, the Hisbah institution was the only municipal authority. It was in charge of a number of services, such as water supply, garbage management, street lighting, and architectural standards enforcement. Its priorities also included eliminating pollution and maintaining hygienic conditions. With the increasing complexity of urban administration, these municipal duties are even more critical today.

Sixthly, in defender of public welfare, the Hisbah institution was a guardian of the rights of the weak and public decency. It attempted to stop immorality, gambling, and unlawful marriages. It protected the rights of slaves and servants by forbidding their mistreatment and forcing debtors to pay their debts. The organization also monitored how the animals were being treated to ensure they weren't being mistreated or overworked. Through these initiatives, it advanced social security, peace, and order.

Seventhly, in building a disciplined community, the organization was essential in creating a moral and disciplinary community. The Muhtasib and deputies monitored public conduct and sought to correct misconduct rather than penalize it. They worked to persuade people to give up immoral behavior and embrace moral behavior. So, the institution of Hisbah was a crucial component of the Islamic government. It tackled social, religious, economic, and local issues to establish a fair, peaceful, and balanced community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The explanation above makes clear that the Hisbah institution was a special and essential part of Islamic governance. It acted as a semi-governmental organization that supervised every aspect of society, demonstrating an all-encompassing approach to governing. This institution demonstrates the sophisticated and well-organized structure of Islamic communities at a time when ignorance and cruelty dominated much of Europe. The Hisbah is a beautiful example of human civilization because of its functions, which were crucial in creating harmonious, peaceful, and balanced communities. Numerous facets of society saw revolutionary changes due to the Hisbah institution. Among its many historical legacies are establishing market regulation and providing public utilities, health care, and education. As the leader of this organization, the Muhtasib was essential in settling common conflicts, defending moral and ethical principles, and dealing with problems like encroachments, unethical business practices, and public decency. The Muhtasib did this in order to protect the rights of the weak, preserve Islamic principles, and guarantee equity in social and commercial dealings. Additionally, the organization was essential in maintaining market oversight, preventing corruption, and guaranteeing the precision of weights and measurements. It served as a safeguard for the weak, a moral compass, and an advocate for the general welfare. With patience, compassion, and an open mind, Muhtasib and his aides concentrated on fixing flaws and raising everyone's standard of living. The contributions of the Hisbah institution were found in every aspect of life, including trade, industry, agriculture, and services. It sought to safeguard societal interests, avoid transgressions of moral and legal norms, and improve people's quality of life in general. The Hisbah's functions have mostly been replaced by contemporary democratic institutions, even though they are frequently modelled after Islamic governmental systems. Nonetheless, the Hisbah's resuscitation and modification in Islamic nations may significantly advance morality, integrity, and human rights in both the public and private spheres. Incorporating the Hisbah institution's tenets and operations into modern Islamic government would improve social cohesion and effectiveness while guaranteeing the preservation and advancement of moral and human values in all areas of life. This study suggests some recommendations as follows:

Firstly, contemporary Muslim societies should contemplate re-establishing institutions modeled after the Hisbah system, adapted to current socio-political circumstances. These institutions can regulate ethical conduct in markets, public services, and governance while fostering accountability and openness.

Secondly, regulatory agencies could be established to enforce equitable trade practices, inhibit monopolies, and standardize product quality. These entities could function as contemporary counterparts to the Muhtasib, overseeing market integrity and safeguarding consumers.

Thirdly, the concepts of the Hisbah system should be incorporated into school curricula to enhance knowledge of its historical importance and contribution to social ethics and socio-economic fairness.

Fourthly, community engagement in maintaining moral and ethical standards should be encouraged via volunteer initiatives, advisory councils, and public awareness campaigns through the communal accountability embodied in the Hisbah system.

Fifthly, it prioritizes measures that mitigate economic inequities, advance social justice, and safeguard vulnerable populations, embodying the Hisbah system's emphasis on public welfare and societal unity.

Sixthly, utilizing Islamic ethical frameworks to inform policy-making and administrative procedures, ensuring governance is consistent with spiritual ideals and contemporary administrative requirements.

Seventhly, promote research integrating Islamic governance principles with modern administrative sciences to effectively adapt the Hisbah system to contemporary circumstances.

Eighthly, formulating networks among Muslim-majority countries to exchange best practices and innovations in incorporating Hisbah-inspired concepts into governance, advancing ethical administration worldwide.

By adopting these guidelines, contemporary Muslim cultures can leverage the timeless principles of the Hisbah system to establish just, ethical, and thriving communities that embody the tenets of Islamic government.

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