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General Bases of Distribution In Islam

1. The distribution system of Islam is grounded in a general ideological base that "Allah is the Only Real Owner." As for man, he is not more than a deputizing vicegerent. He can only manage what he owns within certain limits, specified by Allah.

Allah, the Most High, says:

"And certainly you have come to Us alone as We created you at first, and you have left behind your backs the things which We gave you, and We do not see with you your intercessors about whom you asserted that they were (Allah's) associates in respect to you; certainly the ties between you are now cut off and what you asserted is gone from you." Holy Qur'an (6:95)

"Believe in Allah and His Apostle, and spend out of what He has made to you to be successors of; for those of you who believe and spend shall have a great reward". Holy Qur'an (57:7)

2. Man has natural, instinctive needs which must be met, and under no-circumstances can he be deprived of this right. The aim of Islamic economic legislation is to provide needed commodities for man. Thus in unmistakably made clear in this Prophetic tradition.

"Allah, the Exalted and mighty, looked at the wealth of the well-off. And He looked at the destitute. He ordained a portion from the wealth of the rich to be delivered to the poor to satisfy them. If it had not satisfied them, He would certainly have increased their share." 1

The ability to earn wealth is put at man's disposal to better his life. It is not a goal in itself. Rather it is a means to manage man's economic and daily life. Wealth, therefore, has a social role. It serves man and makes him attain a nobler, and more comfortable life. In its distribution, it must be spread into every cell of the human society's body so that it can cater for all needs.

"Whatever Allah has restored to His Apostle from the people of the towns, it is for Allah and for the Apostle, and for the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, so that it may not be a thing taken by turns among the rich of you, and whatever the Apostle gives you, accept it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep back, and be careful of (your duty to) Allah;

surely Allah is severe in reattributing (evil)". Holy Qur'an (59:7)

- 3. In Islam, ownership in various forms is lawful including individual, communal and state ownerships and which is an axiomatic fact in Figh and Islamic legislation.
- 4. The method of gaining money, property and economic resources are restricted to certain laws as Islam puts restraints on any tendency of greediness or other unscrupulous motives including exploitation.

Islam adopts two important methods to tackle this critical point to frustrate the urges of greediness and exploitation. They are:

A – Rearing and cultivating Muslim individuals and society, both morally and spiritually, in a way that promotes virtuous aspirations to steer clear of greediness and selfishness and present the reality of wealth being only transitory aspects of a temporary life on earth. It is a life that belittles so much attention being paid to competition and making material gains merely for their own sake as man's existence has much greater goals to be achieved for his salvation.

Islam turns its attention to the process of upbringing and focuses its attention on developing the spirit of thrift, innovation and productive goals in line with its cultural values and guidance. Man is advised to overlook the fierce rat race, which is merely for grabbing more wealth and warns him not to drown himself extravagantly and excessively in lusts and corporal pleasures.

Islam calls on man, to vie with his brothers, to create good and give up a part of his property if able in favour of others in need. Man is spurred on by Islamic teachings to shun methods and amass wealth and property, which pollute the spirit, kill the conscience and dispose man to the wrath of Allah. In return, man's reward is ensured in the Hereafter. Undesirable and unproductive ways of accumulating wealth such as usury, hoarding, cheating and other unprincipled methods are forbidden by Islam.

There are bountiful texts and concepts in the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah that instead nurture a noble human spirit and promote the qualities of altruism and benevolence deep in man.

Allah, the Almighty, says in the Qur'an:

"And those who made their abode in the city and in the faith before them love those who have fled to them, and do not find in their hearts a need of what they are given, and prefer (them) before themselves though poverty may afflict them, and whoever is preserved from the niggardliness of his soul, these it is that are the successful ones." Holy Qur'an (59:9)

"Say: In the grace of Allah and in His mercy, in that they should rejoice; it is better than that which they gather." Holy Qur'an (10:58)

B- Laws are the second method employed by Islam to limit ways of accumulating riches and prohibit amassing through unlawful means that do the utmost harm to the community and feeds off the blood of

the impoverished social class.

It is the state that takes the responsibility of achieving economic justice as it is responsible for justice in every social realm. That is why laws strictly forbid usury, hoarding, cheating and manipulating prices ... etc. The state's responsibility is to protect and enforce laws and also to prevent such unlawful practices.

The letter written by Imam Ali (a.s.) to Malik al-Ashtar, his governor in Egypt, clearly testifies to this required intervention, when saying:

"Keep an eye on the activities of traders and industrialists, whether they are nearby or live in far-flung areas in your country.

"Let it be known to you, however, that they are usually stingy misers, intensely self-centered and selfish, suffering from the obsession of grasping and accumulating wealth. They often hoard their goods to make more profit out of them by creating scarcity and black markets. Such practice is extremely injurious to the public on one hand, and defames the ruler on the other.

"So put an end to hoarding up wares because the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has prohibited it. Remember that trade should go on between purchasers and suppliers according to correct measures and weights, and on such responsible terms that neither the consumers nor the suppliers should have to face losses. But if traders and industrialists carry on hoarding and black marketeering, even though you have explicitly warned them earlier, then you must punish them according to the intensity of their crime."

5. Economic balances by means of Islamic taxes: Islam has laid down certain taxes like Zakat (poorrate) and Khums (one-fifth of a Muslim's income paid to the treasury every year). They are taken from the well-off according to certain provisions, and delivered up to the destitute to satisfy their needs, solve the problem of poverty, and in doing so, achieve economic justice. The ultimate goal of Islam here is to meet the economic needs of all Muslim individuals, so that no one is left deprived in the whole Muslim World.

Imam Ja'far bin Muhammad al-Sadiq (a.s.) is reported to have said:

"Surely, Allah the Almighty and Exalted ordained a portion from the wealth of the rich to be handed out to the poor which satisfies them. Otherwise, He would certainly have increased their share. If they, however, remain unsatisfied, that is because some people deny them their undisputed right." 2

In a dialogue between the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and a man who came asking him about faith, the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) described Zakat as a redress for the poor and a means to ensure a balance between the needy and the rich.

The man narrated that he had asked the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.w.) what he called for and describes the following dialogue.

"I call the servants of Allah to serve Allah," the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) replied.

"What do you say?," I enquired.

"Bear witness," the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) said, "that there is no god but Allah and that I, Muhammad, am the Messenger of Allah. You must believe in what He revealed to me, deny the deity of al- at and al-Uzzah, keep up prayer and pay Zakat."

"And what is Zakat?," I asked him.

"The well-off among us," he told me, "hand back the money set aside to the poor among us." 3

Looking at the statement of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.w.) in his using of the verb "hand back," the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) reveals the objective basis on which the process of economic distribution in Islam depends, and the secret of the balance of its concept of economic justice in human society. The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) thus points out the effective role of Islamic taxes in addressing defeats in economic life.

The reason behind that, in the light of the Prophet's statement, is that surplus wealth that ought to be distributed fairly and evenly among individuals, goes directly, due to mismanagement, to the pockets of the well-off and tips the scale at the expense of the poor. Hence, the redress is made by handing back the money to their original and lawful owners, namely the poor.

The Prophet's statement sheds a glaring light on Islam's view of one of the main pillars on which distribution is based.

It is the belief that these taxes are a lawful guarantee to protect the right that slips out of the hands of the poor, due to the self-human attempts to bend the law or on the account of human failure in raising itself to the level where it can implement this natural law in economic life. These taxes underpin the ground on which the pillars of just distribution stand, in order to preserve the economy's stability, secure welfare to everyone and ensure balance is addressed on both sides of the economic scale.

6. Reciprocal social responsibility: Reciprocal social responsibility among Muslims is a further important safeguard towards a just distribution of wealth and combatting destitution and poverty in the Muslim community.

From an Islamic education, Islamic sentiments are developed for a Muslim to feel responsible for his brother. On no account should be bask in life pleasures and luxuries whereas his brothers suffer from the severe pains bitter hunger, and unsatisfied needs.

Islamic law lays down the principle of reciprocal social responsibility on spiritual and moral grounds to implement such concerned behavior. By so doing, Islam build up a strong, tenacious society, in which the individual shoulders his duties by identifying with his suffering brothers.

Numerous traditions and narrations emphasize this principle and urge Muslims to share the burden uniformly.

The Noble Messenger (s.a.w.w.) is quoted to have said:

"Never does he believe in me who goes to bed full, while his neighbor is hungry. Never shall Allah on the Day of Judgment look with favour at the people of a place who pass their night satisfied but among them is a hungry one." 4

He also said:

"Surely he is not a Muslim who does not take interest in the affairs of Muslims. And surely he is not a Muslim who hears a Muslim calling for help and does not respond to his call." 5

He further said:

"All of you are leaders and all of you are responsible for your subjects."

On this point Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a.s.) is quoted to have said:

"The right of the Muslim on the Muslim is that he should never eat his fill while his brother suffers, never should be quench his thirst while his brother suffers thirst, never should he clothe himself while his brother suffers inadequate clothing." 6

Another tradition reads:

"Any believer who denies another faithful something he can certainly offer him or can do for him, on his own or with others' help, Allah shall certainly resurrect him on the Day of Judgment black-faced, with withered eyes and hands tied up to his neck. Someone shall cry out, 'This is the traitor who betrayed Allah and his Messenger.' Then he shall be ordered to be thrown into hell-fire."

Deep in themselves, Muslims feel great human sentiments. With such cooperative, kindly manners, Muslims treat one another. They only act incompatible ways with Islam's excellent teachings, which leave their mark far more than any material and corporal power could do. Muslims move to act, urged by the reward stored for them and by their implanted benevolence more than by the whip of the dictatorial authority.

7 Economic security: In Islam, state is liable for the demands and needs of every single subject, Muslim or non-Muslim, should be unable to provide for himself, through his own personal resources or his sponsor.

This point is best explained again in the letter Imam Ali (a.s.) wrote to his governor in Egypt, Malik al-Ashtar:

"Then I want to caution you about the poor. Fear Allah about their condition and your attitude towards them. They have no support, no resources and no opportunities. They are poor, they are destitute and many of them are crippled and unfit for work. Some of them, come out begging and some (who maintain self–respect) do not beg, but their condition screams about their distress, poverty, destitution and wants. So, protect them and their rights. Allah has laid the responsibility of this on your shoulders. You must fix a share for them from the government treasury. Beside this reservation in cash, you must also reserve a share in kind of crops...etc. from government grain stores in cities, in which such grain are collected and cultivated on state–owned lands. Because in this collection, the share of those living far away from any particular city is equal to the share of those living nearby".

Islamic law, made by this quotation, allots sums of money from the treasury to support the infirm and needy, who can no longer work or that their incomes fall short of covering their expenses. It states clearly the principle the state's responsibility for economic security that applies to every citizen, irrespective of his/her religion.

It is narrated that one day Imam Ali (a.s.) saw a Christian dimmi (non-Muslim citizen living in an Islamic state) begging. Amir al-Mu'minin (a.s.) asked:

"Who is this?"

"Oh Amir al-Mu'minin!," said people, who were present.

"He is a Christian."

"You employed him," Amir al-Mu'minin (a.s.) retorted, "until he became old and infirm then you denied him help. Spend on him from the treasury." 7

8. Lawful sources of wealth: Sources of ownership, or the means by which man can gain wealth, property and amenities of life, are looked upon by Islam as important matters, which define the identity of the economic system, its method of distributing wealth among members of society, fighting poverty and need, and rooting out greed, exploitation and unlawful ways of gaining wealth.

Islam sets two key ways of gaining wealth which are work and need. They are lawfully accepted ways of ownership. 8

A) Employment and natural resources: One may work in agriculture, mining, industry or any field of production or one may give one's services in the fields of medicine, engineering, transportation, education, trade ... etc. In Islam, employment in any field of lawful activity, is the chief way of acquiring wealth and money. Islam lays out great emphasis on the personal role in securing wealth and obtaining money, as we have previously detailed. A) Employment and natural resources: One may work in agriculture, mining, industry or any field of production or one may give one's services in the fields of medicine, engineering, transportation, education, trade ... etc. In Islam, employment in any field of lawful

activity, is the chief way of acquiring wealth and money. Islam lays out great emphasis on the personal role in securing wealth and obtaining money, as we have previously detailed.

B) Need: In the same way Islam made work a legal way of getting money and wealth, it made need a source of ownership for wealth to fight destitution and poverty. But ownership here is different from the former one.

For ownership, in the first case, is the fruit of the direct interaction between man, nature or raw materials, or services rendered to satisfy some needs. Man here becomes entitled to ownership in return for the fruits of his labor.

As for ownership by need, it is the process of conveying property or wealth from one owner to another one on account of the need for it by the new owner. In order of precedence, the latter kind of ownership comes second to the first one. Ownership by need is placed in the category of owning something by inheritance and maintenance as in the case given by the husband to his wife.

The needy, who cannot work, due to bodily infirmity or can find no work, has a share in the money set aside from the taxes of Zakat and Khums, or from the money allotted by the state to meet the needs of the impoverished.

The ultimate result of this economic system being put into practice is that every single member of the Islamic community becomes economically secure. He neither fears poverty nor does he worry about his daily life. On the contrary he feels secure, and has confidence in the community and state he lives under its shade.

Once this unmatched economic system is implemented, and security in welfare prevails alongside with stability. All man's efforts then are channeled into one conduit, which is the competition to do good and to work for building and constructing a society far removed from in–fighting and aggressive and destructive erosions.

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the world.

- 1. Al-Tabari, Mirza Hussein al-Nuri, Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, chapter on zakat.
- 2. Al-Kulaini, al-Kafi, vol. 3, 3rd ed., p. 497
- 3. Sa'id Hawa, al-Rasul (The Messenger), vol. 1, pp. 121123.
- 4. Al-Kulaini, al-Kafi, 3rd ed., p. 668.
- 5. Ibid, p. 164.
- 6. Al-Kulaini, al-Usul min al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 170.
- 7. Al-Hur al-Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 6, 2nd ed., p. 49.
- 8. There are other ways of ownership in Islam allied to work and need, including inheritance, maintenance, donation, gifts, profits of endowments ... etc, which our main focus has not separated out.

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