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The Sanctity of Labor and Work According to Islamic Law

Abstract

The existence, sustenance, and sovereignty of humankind in the universe are proportionate to their labor and work. The most sacred gain for an individual is what they produce and earn through their own effort. According to a fundamental principle, one's labor and work are never in vain; the reward of such efforts will inevitably and fully be granted one day. For this reason, humanity has been encouraged to engage in productive activity—even by going to the mountains with a rope to gather a bundle of wood—and has been strongly urged to avoid laziness and begging. All prophets sent by Allah as leaders for humanity personally practiced various professions, ensuring their own and their families' livelihoods through lawful and legitimate means without depending on others. They left behind the principle of “the sanctity of honest labor and lawful earnings” as a prophetic tradition. To work and produce is a sacred endeavor that gives meaning to life, brings peace, and provides blessing. Using the intellect, body, health, and will bestowed by Allah in pursuits that please Him constitutes a source of dignity and honor for human beings. Conversely, unjust and unlawful means of gain, sought through laziness or irresponsibility, are deemed behaviors contrary to human dignity. A Muslim is obliged, on the one hand, to earn sustenance for their own survival, and on the other hand, to provide for the dependents under their care. Additionally, through giving from their earnings with a sense of social responsibility and as an act of worship, they seek happiness in both this world and the Hereafter. It is precisely because of this multifaceted contribution to both worldly and spiritual life that labor and work are considered sacred in Islam. For this reason, this paper examines, with supporting evidence, the subject of “The Sanctity of Labor and Work According to Islamic Law.”

Keywords: *Islamic law, labor, work, production, sanctity*

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İslam şəriətinə görə əməyin və işin müqəddəsliyi

Xülasə

İnsanın kainatda varlığı, payı və hökmranlığı onun zəhməti və əməyi ilə mütənasıbdır. İnsan üçün ən müqəddəs qazanc öz əlləri ilə istehsal etdiyi və qazandığı şeylərdir. Əsas qaydaya görə, insanın zəhməti heç vaxt hədəf getmir və zəhmətinin qarşılığı bir gün mütləq ona tam şəkildə veriləcəkdir. Bu səbəbdən də insanlara kəndirləri ilə dağa çıxıb istehsalat fəaliyyətində iştirak etmək, bir dəstə odun gətirmək tövsiyə edilmiş, tənbellikdən və dilənçilikdən uzaq durmaları şiddətlə istənilmişdir. Allahın insanlara rəhbər olaraq göndərdiyi bütün peyğəmbərlər müxtəlif peşələrlə məşğul olmuş, heç kimdən asılı olmadan özlərini və ailə üzvlərini halal və qanuni yollarla təmin etmişlər. Onlar “tərin müqəddəsliyi və halal qazanc” prinsipini peyğəmbərlərin sünnəsi olaraq geridə qoymuşlar.

İşləmək və istehsal etmək həyata mənəvi dəyər, sülh və bolluq verən müqəddəs bir səydir. Allahın bəşəriyyətə bəxş etdiyi ağıl, bədən, sağlamlıq və iradə ilə Allahın razı olduğu işlərdə çalışmaq insana hörmət və ehtiram səbəbidir. Tənbellik, məsuliyyətsizlik və qazanc əldə etmədən bəzi ədalətsiz və

qanunsuz yollarla gəlir axtarmaq insan ləyaqətinə zidd davranışlar kimi qiymətləndirilmişdir. Müsəlman insan bir tərəfdən öz həyatını dolandırmaq üçün lazım olan ruzisini qazanmağa çalışır, digər tərəfdən də məsul olduğu ailə üzvlərini təmin edir. Bundan əlavə, qazandıqlarını ibadət məqsədilə ictimai məsuliyyət hissi ilə paylaşmaqla dünya və axirət səadətini axtarar.

Dünya və axirətlə bağlı bu çoxşaxəli faydaya görə, İslam dininə əsasən, əmək və iş müqəddəs hesab olunur. Bu səbəbdən bu məqalədə “İslam şəriətinə görə əməyin və işin müqəddəsliyi” mövzusu dəstəkləyici dəlillərlə araşdırılır.

Açar sözlər: *İslam hüququ, əmək, iş, istehsal, müqəddəslik*

Introduction

As indicated in the Qur’anic verse, “We did not give them bodies that would not eat food” (Enbiyâ 21:8), human beings require a number of necessities—such as food, drink, clothing, and shelter—in order to sustain their lives. According to Islam, working to earn one’s livelihood is a means of dignity, honor, and respect. For this reason, labor and work have been strongly encouraged, while laziness has been severely condemned. Indeed, Allah Almighty created the night for rest and the day for securing sustenance and livelihood (Yûnus 10:67; Kaşâş 28:73; Mü’min 40:61). The Qur’an further emphasizes: “Man will have nothing except what he strives for” (Necm 53:39); “Indeed, We established you on earth and provided for you therein means of livelihood” (A’râf 7:10). Such verses indicate that worldly blessings were created for humankind, yet to benefit from them—to transform these potential blessings into tangible realities—work and effort are indispensable.

Within the framework of Islamic law, the sanctity of labor and work also encompasses a range of fundamental rights for workers, including the freedom to work and earn, the right to establish labor unions, the right to collective bargaining and strike, the right to health, and the right to social security (see Armağan, 2001, pp. 172–193; Committee, 1986, pp. 21–453).

One of the matters about which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) frequently sought refuge in his supplications (Hâşimî, 1981, Hâdîth No. 238) and expressed the greatest concern for his community was laziness (Gümüşhânevî, 1980, Hâdîth No. 227). In Islamic belief, a person who ends the day weary from eating through the work of his own hands is regarded as having his sins forgiven (Hâşimî, 1981, Hâdîth No. 1162). His fatigue is considered an expiation for sins and is counted as charity for him (Hâşimî, 1981, Hâdîth Nos. 1323, 1031, 1033). Moreover, because he does not neglect those under his care, he earns additional reward (Ebû Dâvûd, 1981, Zekât, 45) and is safeguarded from the humiliation of begging (Hâşimî, 1981, Hâdîth No. 975). For this reason, meeting the essential needs required to sustain life necessitates the act of working, which is a sacred endeavor.

The concept of labor and work brings blessings and prosperity to life, and unlike selfish civilizations, Islam—which embodies a civilization of altruism—has historically provided a distinguished example in this regard (Daryal, 1997, pp. 81–138).

Research

In the context of establishing and preserving social order, labor and work hold great importance. In societies where labor, work, and honest effort are regarded as sacred, individuals refrain from seeking illicit gain or unjust enrichment—means of acquisition that are not sanctioned by law. Consequently, unlawful methods of earning and economic behaviors such as theft, extortion, black-market dealings, bribery, usury, fraud, and deception fail to take root within such communities (see Akıntürk, 1975, pp. 61–94; Mâlik b. Enes, 1981, Mûsâkât, 2; Berki, 1982, pp. 171–185; Keskiöglü, 1984, pp. 262–263; Aybay, 1984, pp. 74–102; Kaya & Çalış, 1997, 15/211–216; Kaya, 2005, pp. 29–260; Cin & Akgündüz, 2011, pp. 624–635; Akgündüz, 2013, pp. 221–230; Demirci, 2013, pp. 230–239; Aydın, 2013, pp. 390–400; Çeker, 2014, pp. 103–127; Ekinci, 2016, pp. 510–514; Kahveci, 2019, pp. 124, 127, 129, 173, 176, 207, 223; Erturhan, 2022, pp. 237–238, 267–270).

For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad praised the endeavor of Prophet David (Dâwûd), who sustained his livelihood through his own manual labor and the sweat of his brow (Buhârî, 1981, Buyû’, 5).

In conclusion, according to all revealed religions, labor and work are endowed with sanctity. Indeed, in the *Ten Commandments* delivered by God to Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai, there are religious and moral injunctions such as: “You shall not steal. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (*The Holy Bible*, 2002, p. 92; Yurtaydın & Dağ, 1978, pp. 184–200; Tümer & Küçük, 1993, p. 189; Harman, 2007, 33/348; Uğur, 2011, pp. 50, 55, 124, 318).

3. Legal Ruling

According to Islamic law, it is obligatory (*farḍ*) for an individual to work both to provide for their own livelihood and to support those whose sustenance they are responsible for (Erdem, 2019, pp. 13–42). The Qur’an declares: “*So walk in the pathways of the earth and eat of His provision*” (Mülk 67/15); “*Indeed, man will have nothing except what he strives for. And his striving shall soon be seen*” (Necm 53/39–40); and “*When the prayer is concluded, disperse throughout the land and seek the bounty of Allah*” (Cum’a 62/10). Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad stated: “*No one has ever eaten a better and more lawful provision than that which he earned through his own labor. Indeed, the Prophet of Allah, David (peace be upon him), ate from the work of his own hands*” (İbn Mâce, 1981: Ticâret, 1); “*Working to earn a lawful livelihood is obligatory*” (Gümüshânevî, 1980: Hâdîth No. 3878); “*Seeking lawful sustenance is incumbent upon every Muslim*” (Sâbık, n.d.: 3/125); and “*Allah Almighty loves to see His servant striving for lawful provision*” (Sâbık, n.d.: 3/125). These are but a few among many evidences affirming that labor and work are obligatory in Islam.

In this context, it is a duty for a Muslim to work in order to provide for themselves and their family, and to repay any debts if they exist. Beyond this, striving to earn in order to meet the needs of the poor and assist relatives is deemed commendable (*mustahabb*). Working for the sake of enjoying a comfortable life is considered permissible (*mubâh*). However, working with the intent of arrogance or competing in wealth with others is prohibited (*haram*), even if the earnings are obtained through lawful means. Conversely, working sincerely to financially contribute to the struggle against disbelief, or to spend in the way of Allah, is regarded as a meritorious act, carrying a reward comparable to being in a state of continuous worship (Mevsilî, 2016, pp. 556–557; Yavuz, 1978, pp. 513–515; Committee, 1986, pp. 27–30; Committee, 2006: 539 ff.).

4. Findings

The findings we have obtained regarding “*The Sanctity of Labor and Work According to Islamic Law*” are as follows:

- Labor and work are sacred endeavors. Indeed, there are certain sins that cannot be forgiven merely through prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, or ‘umrah. Such sins may only be expiated through the hardships endured in the pursuit of lawful earnings (Hâşimî, 1981: Hâdîth No. 341).
- A person who works under a contract of service in return for wages is called a worker (Oğuzman, 1984, p. 14; Heyet, 1998, p. 173; Bağdatlı, 2012, p. 345; Aldemir - Aldemir, 2018, p. 518). The subject of such work may be either physical or intellectual. According to Islamic law, manual labor and the sweat of one’s brow are rights protected within the legal framework. Indeed, the principle is established that “*the worker should be paid his wages before his sweat dries*” (Ahmed b. Hanbel, 1982: 2/292; Sâbık, n.d.: 3/125; Bardakoğlu, 2000: 21/386; Döndüren, 2010, p. 655).
- Work is defined as any physical or intellectual activity bearing economic value for the parties involved, and the worker, by means of a service contract, becomes obliged to perform it (Sümer, 1993: 14). In this regard, tailoring (Kudûrî, 1398/1977: 69; Ğamrâvî, n.d.: 287; Cezîrî, 1984: 3/115) and shepherding (Kudûrî, 1398/1977: 71; Günenç, 1992: 1/49–51) are examples of physical labor, while advocacy (Günenç, 1992: 1/63) and teaching the Qur’an for remuneration exemplify intellectual labor (İbn Rüşd, 1981: 2/223–224; Sâbık, n.d.: 3/202–203). One of the evidences allowing remuneration for teaching the Qur’an is the hâdîth: “*The most lawful of wages is that which is received in return for teaching the Book of Allah*” (Müslim, 1981: Selâm, 65; Ebû Dâvûd, 1981: Tıbb, 19; Tirmizî, 1981: Tıbb, 20; Çetin, 1993, p. 121).
- Islam recognizes various means of earning a livelihood. The most virtuous of these is income acquired through jihâd. Thereafter, trade, agriculture, and craftsmanship follow in order of merit.

According to some jurists, agriculture is even more virtuous than trade as a source of sustenance. While begging (*tasawwul*) is not considered a legitimate means of earning in Islam, it is tolerated only as a last resort—so that one may avoid dying of hunger and thereby committing suicide (see Halebî, 1316/1898: pp. 422–423; Bilmen, 1984, pp. 438–439; Uludağ, 1994: 9/300; Toksarı, 1994: 9/298–300; Karaman, 2002, pp. 59–65).

- To prevent disputes between parties, the wages due to a worker must be clearly specified in the employment contract (Nesâî, 1981: Eymân, 44; Ğamrâvî, n.d.: 288; Sâbık, n.d.: 3/204; Döndüren, 2010, p. 655).
- If the employment contract is lawful and free from humiliation or degradation, it is permissible for a Muslim to work for a non-Muslim. Indeed, it is reported that ‘Alî ibn Abî Tâlib once drew water from a well for a Jew in exchange for a single date (Beşer, 2001, pp. 409–411).
- The humane principles established by Islamic law in employer–employee relations (see Committee, 1986: 27–453; Karaman, 2002: 59–83; Committee, 2006: 539 ff.; Döndüren, 2010, pp. 655–659) are by no means inferior to those set forth in Turkish positive law (İzveren, 1974, pp. 1–450; Oğuzman, 1981, pp. 1–612; Oğuzman, 1984, pp. 2–317; Şahlanan, 1992, pp. 1–196; Sümer, 1993, pp. 3–247).
- Unlawful means of gaining wealth such as theft, extortion, slaughter, black market, bribery, fraud, deception, unjust enrichment, etc. In the context of economic behavior, most of the provisions of Islamic law regarding the sanctity of labor and work (see Berki, 1982, pp. 171–185; Kaya - Çalış, 1997: 15/211–216; Cın - Akgündüz, 2011, pp. 624–635; Aydın, 2013, pp. 390–400; Ekinci, 2016, pp. 510–514; Erturhan, 2022, pp. 237–238, 267–270) - except interest (see Nomer, 2013, p. 233; Kılıçoğlu, 2016, pp. 640–656; Eren, 2017, p. 753; Ayan, 2016, pp. 87–88) are provisions adopted by the Turkish positive law system and aim to ensure social order and are important principles that ensure the protection of interest (see Tekinay, 1988, 252, 598, 618, 640, 968; Oğuzman - Öz, 2000, 11, 133, 689; Nomer, 2013, 111, 201, 233; Reisoğlu, 2014, 124, 141, 162, 274, 286). The reason why it is said “interest excluded” is that, according to Turkish positive law, interest is defined as the legal fruit of the receivable and is legally protected (see Nomer, 2013, p. 233). According to Islamic law, interest is strictly prohibited (see Bakara 2/188, 275, 276, 278, 279; Âl-i İmrân 3/130; Nisâ 4/29, 31, 160, 161; Rûm 30/39; Buhârî, 1981: Buyû’, 113; Müslim, 1981: Mûsakât 105; Günenç, 1992: 1/344, 345; Karaman, 2002, pp. 70–72; Döndüren, 2010, pp. 386–409; Kaya, 2013, pp. 117–133; DİB High Board of Religious Affairs, 2018: 502–508), interest-bearing transactions are considered as declaring war against Allah and the Prophet (Bakara 2/278, 279).

Conclusion

The physical and spiritual development of humankind, as well as the conditions they will encounter in the Hereafter, are closely related to the type of nourishment they consume. A body sustained through lawful earnings develops in purity, whereas a person who seizes the property or rights of others through wrongful acts, unjust acquisition, illicit enrichment, or other means condemned by law and religion not only harms themselves but also causes numerous adverse consequences for those under their care. For this reason, unlawful methods of gain such as theft, extortion, black-market dealings, bribery, usury, fraud, and deception have been declared *ḥarām* in Islam.

In contrast, earnings obtained through lawful means as the outcome of labor and work are deemed sacred in Islam. This is because the peace and prosperity of society largely depend on lawful and honest earnings, while much of the social chaos and corruption arises from illicit and unjust acquisitions. In this context, the present full-text study on “*The Sanctity of Labor and Work According to Islamic Law*” holds significant importance.

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