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# Determining Conformity to Islamic Ethical Principles in Economic Practices: A Case of Pakistan

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## Abstract

*The paper discusses sources of income permitted and prohibited in the faith of Islam. Under ethical constraints i.e. the allowed framework in which an individual or group of individuals can undertake economic pursuits, the Islamic teachings relating to the right conduct in economic pursuits are provided. Then, when the person in his/her economic pursuits becomes an earning individual, the Islamic teachings to an earning individual are provided in the light of Quran and Hadith. The paper also compares secular and Islamic ethics briefly. The paper also analyzes conformity of economic practices with Islamic principles and identifies specific ethical issues and deviations in specific sectors of economy at the sector and industry level.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic Ethics, Islamic Morality, Secular Ethics, Moral Relativism, Ethical Relativism.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Morality is very eloquently discussed by Kant (1784/1785). He said that intentions define actions and not the consequences and not even compassion. He said it because compassion is temporary, a particular state and is not absolute. However, intentions best define the existence of morality in actions.

But, Kant did not give the method by which we could prioritize Maxims. For instance, truth and justice both are important moral values. But, what should we do if there is a conflict between the two? For illustration, if a murderer is known to us as murderer, but if we do not have witnesses to prove him as murderer in the court of law, should we give false testimony to convict him?

Islam helps us to prioritize Maxims. Islam shows us that this world is not fair in all respects. A morally upright man is not necessarily the most honorable man in the world. A morally upright trader is not necessarily the richest in the world. Not all murderers have been or will be convicted in this world. Even if all murderers were convicted, it will not be 'naturally' possible to give equitable punishment to the murderers who have killed more than one human being.

Even if it was possible, it will not be possible to reverse the immoral actions. What happened has happened and cannot be reversed. Death is the plainest truth and if justice cannot be provided in the life of a person and that being too not equitable; then, is it not rational if we believe in life after death where everyone would be given equal rewards and equal punishment for his acts and God by his infinite wisdom would be able to judge without any doubt the intentions behind the actions and justice will be provided to each and every one?

Furthermore, only with the knowledge of life after death and the belief in God, can one decide to act morally as an end in itself and not merely as means to a material end. Moral act in Islam also is a means to an end i.e. to achieve eternal success and blessings of God. But, it is not a material end confined to this life only. In this way, the utilitarian mind is also satisfied as happiness is a relative term not achieved only by material things. The fact that moral actions even if they are not rewarded in this world will be rewarded in life hereafter satisfies the utilitarian mind.

We know what is right and what is wrong through our conscience. In matters where our conscience does not guide us, God intervenes and guides us through His prophets. Therefore, Prophets guide us in matters where we might not have reached the right decision about right and wrong through our conscience, for instance, interest, gambling, liquor etc. They might seem useful and right. But, God tells us in Holy Quran that there is more harm in these things than good. Therefore, in this study, we try to delineate ethical precepts as per the faith of Islam and compare ideals with practices.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

This study reviews the authentic and agreed upon sources of injunctions of the faith of Islam relevant to ethics in economic context and based on the ethical principles so obtained, it compares the conformity to ethical principles in current economic practices.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The study sets forth following important objectives:

- To delineate a set of ethical guidelines in the light of Islamic principles.
- To identify deviations from Islamic economic principles in individual sectors or industry.
- To determine conformity to ethical principles in specific sectors and industry.

## **1.4 Importance of the Study**

This study reviews the authentic and agreed upon sources of injunctions of the faith of Islam i.e. Holy Quran and authentic sayings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) as reported by compilers of His sayings. The study will help us in comparing principles and performance by taking principles from authentic and agreed upon sources and practices as followed in specific industries and sectors.

## **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The study focuses on determining the extent to which practice matches with Islamic ethical ideals. The study takes into account practices in various sectors and industries and tries to determine how much deviation or conformity exists between Islamic ethical ideals and practices by first delineating the Islamic ethical ideals as per the sources of Islam.

## **1.6. Limits of the Study**

The study could not disclose the name of specific individuals and companies in comparing ethical performance since the content is investigative, but for the general public and not for the authorities or regulators.

## **1.7 Research Methodology**

The study is qualitative and analytical in nature. It reviews the Islamic ethical principles as laid down in sources of injunctions in Islam and it analyzes practices followed based on general review of various magazine reports, featured articles and newspaper reports

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Sources of Income Permissible In Islam**

Every source of income in which benefits are enjoyed by all the concerning parties on the just basis.

### **2.2. Sources of Income Prohibited In Islam**

- a) Bribery (Al-Baqarah:188).
- b) Usurping others' property (Al-Baqarah: 188).
- c) Fraud (Al-Imran: 161).
- d) Stealing and Robbery (Al-Maida: 38).

- e) Income from sources of vulgarity (Al-Noor: 19).
- f) Gambling (Al-Maida: 90).
- g) Wine and its business (Al-Maida: 90).
- h) Interest (Al-Baqarah: 275).

### **2.3. Moral Directives Of Islam In Conducting Business**

#### **2.3.1 Moral Conduct in Entrepreneurship**

“And measure full when you measure. And weigh with an even balance. This is better and its end is good.” [Al-Bani-Israel: 35].

“They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God, unto them give tidings (O Muhammad) of a painful doom.” [Al-Tauba:34].

“You resort to oaths as instruments of mutual deceit, so that a person might take greater advantage than another; although, Allah puts you to the test through this. Surely, on the Day of Resurrection, He will make clear the truth concerning the matters over which you differed.” [Al-Nahl:92].

“Who so desires the reward of the world, then with Allah is the reward both of the world and of the Hereafter. And Allah is Hearing, Seeing.” [Al-Nisa:134].

“And that the man will not get but what he endeavors. And that his endeavor shall soon be seen.” [An-Najm: 39-40].

“O Believers! Whenever you lend money for a particular period, write and someone among you must write it justly. And the one who can write must not refuse.” [Al-Baqara: 282].

Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) has said that “Almighty Allah’s mercy descends on one who is gentle at the time of buying, selling, and requesting payment.” (Tirmizi).

Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said: “whosoever sells a defective product without disclosing its defect to the purchaser, shall earn the permanent anger of Almighty Allah and the angels continuously curse such a person.” (Ibn-e-Maja).

Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) has exhorted that we should refrain from taking oaths unnecessarily; for although, it helps in the sale of one’s products, it reduces the blessings. (Bukhari; also in Muslim).

Abu Qatadah related that the Prophet said: “If anyone would like Allah to save him from the hardships of the Day of Resurrection, he should give more time to his debtor who is short of money, or remit his debt altogether.” (Muslim)

Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet said: “A time will come upon the people when one will not care how one gains one’s money, legally or illegally.” (Bukhari).

It is reported by Jabir that the Prophet said: “The flesh and body that is raised on unlawful sustenance shall not enter Paradise. Hell is more deserving to the flesh that grows on one’s body out of unlawful sustenance.” (Ahmad).

Abu Said related that the Prophet said: “The truthful and trustworthy businessman will be in the company of Prophets, saints and martyrs on the Day of Judgment.” (Darimi, Tirmidhi).

Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet of Allah (saaws) said, "And what is most likely to send people to Paradise? Being conscious of Allah and good manners." (Bukhari, Tirmidhi & Ahmed).

### **2.3.2 Islamic Teachings and Unethical Trade Practices**

"Allah will deprive usury of all blessing, but will give increase for deeds of charity" [Al-Baqara: 276].

Keeping the commodities of general use in possession and not supplying them in the market for the sake of increasing the price is prohibited (Ahmed-Bin-Hanbal: 19802).

Narrated Jabir ibn Abdullah: Allah's Messenger cursed the accepter of interest and its payer, and one who records it, and the two witnesses; and he said: They are all equal (Muslim).

"Woe to those that deal in fraud, those who, when they have to receive by measure from men, exact full measure, but, when they have to give by measure or weight to men, give less than due. Do they not think that they will be called to account?" [Al-Mutaffifin:1-4].

The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) cursed the one who pays bribes and the one who takes bribes. (Abu Dawud, Hadith no 3573).

Bidding more and more only for deceiving is prohibited (Bukhari: 2167).

Trying to buy commodities before they reach market is prohibited because market will decide the price (Muslim: 1517).

### **2.3.3 Futures & Forward Trading: Islamic View**

Ibn Abbas (Allah be pleased with them) reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: "He who buys food grain should not sell it until he has taken possession of it." (Muslim).

### **2.3.4 Analogical Deduction in Matters: Islamic View**

Nu'man b. Bashir (Allah be pleased with him) reported: "I heard Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as having said this (and Nu'man) pointed towards his ears with his fingers): What is lawful is evident and what is unlawful is evident, and in between them are the things doubtful which many people do not know. So he who guards against doubtful things keeps his religion and honor blameless, and he who indulges in doubtful things indulges in fact in unlawful things, just as a shepherd who pastures his animals round a preserve will soon pasture them in it. Beware, every king has a preserve, and the things God has declared unlawful are His preserves. Beware, in the body there is a piece of flesh ; if it is sound, the whole body is sound and if it is corrupt the whole body is corrupt, and hearken it is the heart." (Bukhari; also in Muslim).

### **2.3.5 Benefits of Honest Conduct in Partnership**

Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) has said that Almighty Allah proclaims: "I am a one third partner of a two man partnership until one of them acts dishonestly to his partner, and, in such event, I then leave them." (Abu Daud).

### **2.3.6 The importance of Paying One's Liability**

It is narrated by Abu Musa Ashari that the Prophet said: "After the major sins which must be avoided, the greatest sin is that someone dies in a state of debt and leaves behind no asset to pay it off." (Darimi)

### **2.3.7 Job Responsibility of Employee: Islamic View**

Narrated Abu Musa Al-Ashari: The Prophet said, "The honest treasurer who gives willingly what he is ordered to give, is one of the two charitable persons, (the second being the owner)." (Mishka'at)

### **2.3.8 Responsibility of Employer: Islamic View**

Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said: "Give the labor his wage before his sweat dries". (Ibn-e-Majah)

### **2.3.9 Justice and Honesty: Islamic View**

"O believers! Stand firmly for justice, giving witness for Allah, may be therein your own loss, or of your parents or of your relations. Against whom you be a witness, he be a rich or be a poor, in any case Allah has more power than anyone over them, therefore follow not passion lest you may be far away from justice; and if you distort or turn your face, then Allah is aware of your doings." [Al-Nisa: 135]

"O believers! Stand-up firmly by the Commandments of Allah, bearing witness with justice and let not the enmity of any people incite you that you should not do justice. Do justice that is nearer to piety and fear Allah, undoubtedly, Allah is aware of your doings." [Al-Maida: 8]

### **2.3.10 Gender & Ethnic Discrimination: Islamic View**

'O people! We created you from one man and one woman and made you branches and tribes that you may recognize one another. Undoubtedly, the most respected among you in the sight of Allah is he who is more pious, verily, Allah is knowing, Aware. [Al-Hujurat:13].

## **2.4 Directives of Islam to an Earning Individual**

### **2.4.1 Encouragement for Welfare Spending**

...Remember, the example of those who spend in the way of God is like that of a grain, which sprouts into seven ears, producing a hundred grains in each ear. God [by His mercy] increases manifold [the rewards of such deeds] for whom He wills. And Indeed, God is extremely bountiful [in rewarding His servants], fully aware [of your circumstances and deeds]. [Al-Baqara: 261].

"Those needy ones who are wholly wrapped up in the cause of Allah, and who are hindered from moving about the earth in search of their livelihood especially deserve help. He who is unaware of their circumstances supposes them to be wealthy because of their dignified bearing, but you will know them by their countenance, although they do not go about begging of people with importunity. And whatever wealth you will spend on helping them, Allah will know of it." [Al-Baqara: 273]

"Look, you are being called upon to expend in Allah's Way, yet some of you are being niggardly, whereas the one who is niggardly is, in fact, being niggardly only to himself. Allah is Self-Sufficient: it is you who are the needy. If you turn away, Allah will replace you by another people, and they will not be like you." [Muhammad: 38]

"(O Prophet!) Tell those of My servants who believe that they should establish Prayer and spend out of what We have provided them with, both secretly and openly, before there arrives the Day when there will be no bargaining, nor any mutual befriending." [Ibrahim: 31]

"Have you seen him who belies the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter? He it is, who drives away the orphan and does not urge giving away the food of the poor." (Al-Ma'un: 1 - 3)

Those who blame those Muslims who give charity willingly and those who get not but with their hard labor, so they laugh at them. Allah will punish them for their laughing and for them, is the painful. [Al-Tauba: 79]

Asmah related that the Prophet said: "Spend, and do not count, lest Allah counts against you. Do not withhold your money, lest Allah withholds from you. Spend what you can." (Bukhari; also in Muslim).

Abu Huraira related that the Prophet said: The Lord's commandment for every one of His slaves is, 'Spend on others, and I will spend on you'. (Bukhari; also in Muslim).

#### **2.4.2 Attitude of the giver of charity**

"Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and do not follow up their spending by stressing their benevolence and causing hurt, will find their reward secure with their Lord. They have no cause for fear and grief.

To speak a kind word and to forgive people's faults is better than charity followed by hurt. Allah is All-Sufficient, All-Forbearing.

Believers! Do not nullify your acts of charity by stressing your benevolence and causing hurt as does he who spends his wealth only to be seen by men and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day. The example of his spending is that of a rock with a thin coating of earth upon it: when a heavy rain smites it, the earth is washed away, leaving the rock bare; such people derive no gain from their acts of charity. Allah does not set the deniers of the Truth on the right way." (Al-Baqara: 262 - 264)

#### **2.4.3 Islamic View on Unscrupulous Consumption**

"Give to the near of kin his due, and also to the needy and the wayfarers. Do not squander your wealth wastefully; for those who squander wastefully are Satan's brothers, and Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord." (Al-Bani-Israel: 26 - 27)

"Do not keep your hand fastened to your neck nor outspread it, altogether widespread, for you will be left sitting rebuked, destitute." (Al-Bani-Israel: 29)

"Who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor miserly but keep the golden mean between the two (extremes)" (Al-Furqan: 67)

Amr ibn Shuaib, on his father's authority said that his grandfather related that the Prophet said: "When you eat, drink, give charity and wear clothes, let no extravagance or pride be mixed up with what you do." (Ibn Maja; also in Nasai).

#### **2.4.4 Stinginess & Wealth Accumulation: Islamic View**

"Those who do not spend their wealth that has been given to them by Allah must not think that it is good for them; indeed it is bad for them (Al-Imran: 180)".

..."Allah does not love the arrogant and the boastful, who are niggardly and bid others to be niggardly and conceal the bounty which Allah has bestowed upon them. We have kept in readiness a humiliating chastisement for such deniers (of Allah's bounty)" Al-[Al-Nisa: 36-37]

Jabir reported that the Prophet said: "Avoid doing injustice to others, for on the Day of Judgment, it will turn into manifold darkness, and safeguard yourself against miserliness, for it ruined those who were before you. It incited them to murder and treating the unlawful as lawful." (Muslim)

Abu Said Khudri related that the Prophet said: "There are two habits which are never present together in a believer: miserliness and bad manners." (Tirmidhi).

Abu Huraira related that the Prophet said: "When someone is made rich but he does not pay Zakat for his wealth, then on the Day of Judgment his money will be turned into a poisonous snake with two black spots on its head. It will coil around his neck and bite his cheeks and

say: 'I am your wealth, I am your treasure'. Then the Prophet recited verse 3:180 of the Quran." (Bukhari)

#### **2.4.5 Paying Zakah**

"Say your prayers (Namaaz) and pay Zakah [Al-Muzammil: 20]".

Establish Prayer and dispense the Purifying Alms (Zakat) and bow in worship with those who bow [Al-Baqara: 43]

#### **2.4.6 Entrepreneurship Vs Dependency**

Narrated Hakim bin Hizam that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "The upper hand is better than the lower hand (i.e. he who gives in charity is better than him who takes it). One should start giving first to his dependents. And the best object of charity is that which is given by a wealthy person (from the money which is left after his expenses)." (Bukhari)

#### **2.4.7 Social Responsibility: Islamic View**

Anas related that the Prophet said: "If any Muslim plants something or sows seed from which a man, a bird or an animal eats, it counts as a charity for him." (Bukhari; also in Muslim)

#### **2.4.8 Communal Development: Islamic View**

Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet said: "The best charity is that which is practiced by a wealthy person. And start giving first to your dependents." (Bukhari)

Salman ibn Amer reported that the Prophet said: "To give something to a poor man brings one reward, while giving the same to a needy relation brings two: one for charity and the other for respecting the family ties." (Ahmad, Ibn Majah, Nasai, Tirmidhi)

#### **2.4.9 Utility and Satisfaction: Islamic View**

Abu Huraira narrated that the Prophet said: "Wealth is not in having vast riches, it is in contentment." (Bukhari; also in Muslim).

### **2.5. Comparing Islamic Ethics with secular Ethics**

Now, we try to see how much related or unrelated is the secular and Islam ethics. Interest is prohibited in all monotheist religions (See Exodus 22:25, Leviticus 25:35-36, Deuteronomy 23:20, Psalms 15:5, Proverbs 28:8, Nehemiah 5:7 and Ezakhiel 18:8,13,17 & 22:12). However, interest is pervasive in capitalism, an economic system based on secular ideals. Even among secular literature, one finds criticism on interest. Aristotle (384-322 BC) in his book "Politics" criticized interest in following words "Of all modes of getting wealth, this is the most unnatural". In value neutral economics too, we find criticism on interest. Keynes (1936, p. 377) in his monumental work "General Theory of Income, Employment, Interest and Money" reasoned in following words:

"Interest to-day rewards no genuine sacrifice, any more than does the rent of land. The owner of capital can obtain interest because capital is scarce, just as the owner of land can obtain rent because land is scarce. But whilst there may be intrinsic reasons for the scarcity of land, there are no intrinsic reasons for the scarcity of capital."

Ghamidi (2007) analyzing the consultative decision making principle in Islam as taken from the Holy Quran (Shura: 38) deduced that democracy as a principle of decision making is not alien to Islam; rather it is most desirable as per the Islamic principles.



Chapra (2003) viewed secular societies continuing to belittle the need for moral development; though all of them now profess commitment to development with justice. He emphasized that even material development with justice is not possible without moral development. The rationale for this contention is that development with justice requires an 'efficient' and equitable use of all resources and both 'efficiency' and 'equity' can neither be defined nor actualized without the injection of a moral dimension into economic pursuits. In post modernism literature, Marcuse (1964) has described this phenomenon as 'One Dimensional Man' in his book with the same title.

However, on the issue of comparing practices with values, Pal (2006) criticized the traditional approach of comparing Islamic ideals with practiced capitalism. He stated that systems can not be analyzed judicially with taking ideals of one and the practice of the other.

### **3. Analysis of Economic Practices in the light of Islamic Ethical Principles**

#### **3.1 Health Industry**

Kickbacks are a common phenomenon in pharmaceutical industry. Less reputable or newly established companies offer kickbacks to doctors to prescribe their drugs. Kickbacks are given in the form of commission, hotel or airline ticket reservation etc. Such companies also compromise on quality and tamper with content and quantity.

Some doctors take more than one job without taking approval from their principal fulltime employer. Some doctors in public hospitals provide low cost medicines to the suppliers on commission. Some doctors use medicines in public hospitals in their private clinics by using their authority and some of them remain absent from their duties in public hospitals and further their self interest in private clinics. Trading of human organs is also in vogue in this sector.

#### **3.2 Information Technology Industry:**

Most of the software companies operating at a lower scale do not use licensed software in their organizations. Often, programmers working in their organization take the proprietary program code and build their own competing software or offer to sale the stolen code to third parties. Sometimes, such software companies to gain market offer solutions at economic rates, but let the program have some bugs due to which the company rehires the firm again and the firm has sufficiently more bargaining power in the maintenance contract. The customers of these software companies often violate copyrights and make pirated copies of software to avoid cost of purchasing expensive licensed software over and again.

#### **3.3 Consumer Goods Industries:**

Often, consumer goods producers indulge in deceptive advertising. Tampering with quality and quantity is common. Ingredients written on packaging do not often match in reality. Due to strict quality standards worldwide, they often do not make into the international market. But, since supervision of quality standards lag in most Muslim countries as most of them are developing countries and lack resources to protect environmental damage, they get away with low quality standards in the domestic market. Though, utility maximization does not contradict with Islamic principles, but, when it is maximized using liquor, intoxicants, indulging in consuming/selling vulgar silver screen content etc, it is not recommendable as per Islamic ethical principles.

Targeted sales are achieved giving sales team concrete sales targets. To achieve the sales targets, the members of the sales team often use deceptive information, over commit on quality and performance to produce the sales. Since ethical conduct is often not the bottom line in these companies, the companies give better performance appraisal for the members of the sales team who add to the bottom line i.e. profits. That is why, ethical conduct is not only deprived of incentives, but rather it is disincentivised.

### **3.4 Capital Goods Industries:**

Capital goods industries are often neutral to their responsibility to the environment. Wastage of resources polluting environment is very common. License to operate is obtained by offering kickbacks and those who are authorized to provide licenses to rightmost candidates forgo due diligence if offered kickbacks, else they indulged in red tapism.

### **3.5 Agriculture Sector:**

In the agriculture sector, landlords use undue influence to repress tenants. Child labor and even bonded labor is common if a person or his ancestors fail to pay usurious loans. Sharecropping is not always done as per the terms of the contract. Property rights are not enforced everywhere and might is right prevails where there is lack of property rights and law enforcement.

In trade of perishable commodities, middlemen use undue influence to obtain goods at cheap prices as warehouses and marketing channels are outdated and insufficient. In trade of commodities, supply is deliberately restricted to raise prices i.e. hoarding.

### **3.6 Financial Sector:**

In financial sector, agency problem between shareholder and management and between management and creditors raises ethical issues. Management often works to serve its interests at the cost of either creditors or shareholders. Moral hazard is common in financial institutions whereby the management may be less diligent and responsible in providing loans to candidates since the money involved is not their own, but of shareholders or creditors. Having asymmetric information, investors can take benefit of some private information which is not made public. This asymmetric information is also marketable for kickbacks. In financial institutions, gambling and interest is rampant and is a deviation from Islamic prohibition of interest and gambling.

In mergers and acquisitions and privatization of public companies, due diligence is not always carried out appropriately. In most developing countries, some of the most strategic national assets in the form of public companies were sold at below market or book value prices. Transparency, due diligence, corruption and conflict of interest are the major ethical issues in such situations.

### **3.7 General Ethical Issues in Work Ethics:**

Justice and honesty are the virtues of utmost importance in all religions and other comprehensive doctrines. As per Islam, the job one gets to do is a trust. One needs to honor the trust. This implies that one ought to perform due diligence in all respects of one's job. Its more practical implication is that one ought to utilize the resources, abilities and authority in the best possible manner. Theft, crime (blue color or white color), situations creating conflict of interest, non-compliance to due diligence etc are all pretty common deviations from Islamic ethical principles present and observed in our society.

In recruitment, favoritism and nepotism are the major ethical issues to deal with. Though, corporations brag about being an equal opportunity employer, but often, some discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and gender is practiced in an undocumented way.

## **Conclusion**

The study identified various deviations in economic practices from Islamic ethical principles in individual sectors and industries. Theft, piracy, bonded labor, interest, gambling, moral hazard, kickbacks, nepotism, favoritism, red tapism, conflict of interest, holding asymmetric information, adulteration, corruption, undue influence, coercion, discrimination etc were identified as major ethical deviations in current economic practices as compared with Islamic ethical principles. The study provided a set of agreed upon ethical guidelines based on which economic practices in other sectors and industries both nationally and internationally can be studied.

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