CHAPTER 3

ISLAM AND ECONOMY IN IRAN:
AN EXPLORATION OF INTERRELATIONSHIP

The major economic systems in the world hold that actors are free either to act based upon nature or a historical class condition. Even laws and socio-economic relations are believed to emanate from the exercise of human nature. Islamic economy is different from these two theories. In the study of this kind of economy we come to know that human nature according to Islam is man-made as well as divinely determined. Since man's identity has at least two dimensions, moral and material which opposing to each other and each dimension calls man to itself. Nevertheless, there are physical requirements which most of the people, with every stage of perfection and every kind of attitude towards the life approach to them as the most important mental occupation and urgent problem of the life. Disappointment and deprivation in this field will prevent usually from manifestation of high exalted requirements and also from effort to higher ends. The Prophet Mohammad said that “O' God, increase the bread for us and do not separate it of us, since if we do not have bread, we will not pray and fast and will not perform other duties which you have assigned”. Development of human characteristics and talents depend upon being alive and healthy; besides, physical health helps in providing his basic requirements. After man's banishment from Paradise and the beginning of

his new phase in search of livelihood, *Quran* emphasizes importance of exploitation of earth’s bounties. “God has created you out of earth and has asked you to inhabit”.2

It may be suitable to refer briefly to the point on *monotheistic* and *polytheistic* religions suggested by Arnold Toynbee and Diasaku Ikeda. These two authors in their joint work *choose life* have emphasized that the monotheistic religions have supported the domination of nature by man. According to them, this idea has led to ecological imbalance in many parts of the world, say for instance the oil extraction in a large scale. Toynbee says that “The revolutionary concept of Judaic monotheism opened the way for the deliberately, wholesale violation of *Esho Funi*.3 The belief that what I have called the spiritual presence in and behind the universe was concentrated in a single, transcendent, human like God involved the further belief that nothing else in the universe is divine”.4 Toynbee follows that “According to chapter I, verses 26-30, of the book of Genesis God placed the whole of his nonhuman creation of the disposal of his human creatures to exploit in any way that they might choose”.5 In contrast, the polytheistic religions (*Shintoism and Hinduism*) have stressed harmony between man and nature. The reason for this is that monotheism withdrew divinity from nature and made it

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2 *Quran*, 11:61.
3 According to Ikeda the complete meaning of these two concepts is that human life and environment are inseparable.
5 Ibid., p. 39.
transcendental. Toynbee says that “the effect of this revolutionary doctrine was to disrupt the funi-inseparableness - between shoho-the independent life entity and - eho – the environment supporting that life. Man was divorced from his natural environment, which was divested of its former aura of divinity. Man was licensed to exploit an environment that was no longer sacrosanct.”

In contrast, polytheism emphasizes the presence of divinity in nature’s manifestations (rock, tree, river, etc.). This made the nature sacred, because, according to Ikeda, in polytheistic religions there is a harmony between man and nature. Ikeda says, “only by living in harmony with the natural environment in a give-and-take relation is it possible for man to develop his life creatively. Based on this approach, Buddhism teaches that the relationship between man and nature is one not of opposition but of mutual dependance”. Toynbee asserts his view about all the followers of monotheistic religions and says that “the salutary respect and awe with which man had originally regarded his environment was thus dispelled by Judaic monotheism in the versions of its Israelite originators and of Christians and Muslims”.

In fact, according to Islam, man is created out of the world and he shall provide his requirements from the world. But the point that must be referred to is that Islam has emphasized that a Muslim man has to avoid overindulgence.

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., p. 37.
8 Ibid., p. 39.
In Islamic vocabulary, the word *Israf* refers to prodigality which is strictly prohibited. As such there is another *Quranic* word *tama* – greed – which its advice to man is to maintain certain limit in worldly desires. Islam does not permit hoarding which exceeds the personal needs of a household. Hence, to extract from world’s riches more than necessities is to indulge in prodigality and avarice which are prohibited in Islam.

Another point is that according to Islam, God is ubiquitous. This is the reason why a Muslim can not commit sin, because even in his aloneness God is present. God says to man that “I am even closer to you from your neck blood vessel”. A Muslim prays upon the ground anywhere in the world, because *prophet* has prayed upon it and therefore ground is sacred and pure. When a man prays upon the ground, it means that man is in the presence of God and God observes him. If God is transcendent because He is beyond everything, He is higher than everything. But it never means that God is absent from the real world. God is ubiquitous and his spirit has refused all creation from inanimate objects, flora and fauna. Again God says to man that “whatever direction you face God is present and everywhere belongs to God”. The superiority of man in the world is because he is appointed as vicegerent of God on earth. Man uses worldly affluences but at the same time, he is not permitted to use to such an extent that it leads to the impoverishment of nature.

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9 *Quran*, 50:16
10 Ibid., 2:115.
In the *Holy Quran* God commands man: "eat and drink but do not squander".\(^{11}\) That is not a monotheistic religion per se which leads to ecological problems, rather, it is the man who neglects God and makes excessive exploitation of the earth and creates many difficulties on the earth for inhabitants.

Countries like Japan use a great deal of natural energies. In fact, they have high appetite and desire to exploit various resources on the earth. They try even to utilize saltish coastal lands. Further, they wish to use radiant (sun) energy. This is not to argue that the exploitation from these different worldly resources is useful or not. Rather, the question is that there should be limitations which man has taken into consideration while exploiting the natural resources of the earth. It seems if Islamic tenets are correctly interpreted the ecological imbalances can be avoided. It is only in this way that man will control his greed and extravagant quality.

**Importance or Work**

The basic requirements of man are entirely available on the earth for the purpose of continuation of his life and also his move towards perfection. God has never demanded any kind of deprivation for His servants. One of the famous statements of the Prophet Mohammad is that "Poverty will result in blasphemy very soon". (But prevention of poverty is because of the promotion of other aspects of man, namely move towards perfection and also crystallization of God's vicegerency). Therefore, Islamic man must work on the earth to fulfill this aim which God has prescribed. In this way nobody has the

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., 7:31.
right to prevent others from the exploitation of earth and from making their livelihood. Man is free to perform his duty but he should not interfere with the freedom of others.

Islamic approach towards economy is a kind of thought that provides for basic needs as well as movement towards perfection. This kind of thought does not encourage man’s isolation and withdrawal from social affairs. At the same time, Islam teaches that property and wealth are only a means to self-protection, guarantee of mankind and transition towards perfection.

The process through which mankind would be able to reach to perfection is doing work. Islamic man cannot exempt himself from work in the society. Everybody is responsible for acquiring essential requirements which are to be needed for the perfection of the society. In Islam, work is counted as an essential basis in the interaction between man and nature, and at the same time, he has a right to use natural gifts (talents). With the exception of some elements like air which are available and ready everywhere, activity and struggle are involved in gaining access to the required materials. People have to obtain food either through collecting or fishing, make the shelter, repel the danger and repulse the enemy. To gratify the hunger individuals who are able to work get up and look for food.

Deliberately, the division of social labour emanates from man’s comprehension and reasoning which recognizes that the social organization operates on the basis of cooperation. In such conditions society will meet its
requirements under the provision of division of labour much easier than before. In these social settings, the most important aspect is engagement in work which is enjoined upon each and every individual in the society in order to attain the required level of comfort until all of the members of the society could live in rest and comfort. According to Islamic teachings, the perfect man is not an isolated man, rather, he is a person who cultivates his talents and potentialities through his service in the society. Basic agency in Islam for the exploitation of natural gifts is the utilization of human efforts and creative work. Those who have the ability to work, can have access to the enjoyment of natural resources and man-made productions. In other words, work and necessity are the two prior conditions in economic relations which support the exploitation of nature and social production.

The basic end of man's crucial activities is to achieve higher stages of perfection and get nearer to absolute perfection. Natural gifts are necessities for a better and comfortable life. Achievement of material and mental activities are necessary to attain perfection. Therefore, Islam views these activities in terms of means to attain certain aim and it does not give permission to man to stop at that stage. From the Islamic point of view "the world is a farm for hereafter." Islam opposes any kind of teaching and way of thought whereby individuals are encouraged to live in isolation and keep away from the use of material and natural gifts. It accepts the life with all its natural processes, inclinations and

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actions and reactions. There are several statements in Islamic Hadith that call the faithful person to earn his sustenance in the world.

*Prophet Mohammad* says that “The man who seek legitimate livelihood he is as a soldier of holy war for God’s sake”\(^{13}\). In another statement also *Prophet* says that “the most essential duty after prayer is seeking livelihood”\(^{14}\). In this way, wealth and property are means, and hence, whatever material and economical activities which help in the perfection of the human society are right and those which prevent it are wrong. Creative work and social service are extended for the attainment of perfection of society. They are treated as duty which should be inherent in both thought and spirit. The work is maker of man's personality in itself and the cause of his growth and perfection but at the same time, *donation* of wealth, which remains after the fulfillment of needs, is a means by which a Muslim can attain his higher goals. Obviously, this wealth has to be obtained through creative work.

*Prophet Mohammad* as a perfect man was engaged in worldly affairs. Before his appointment to Prophethood, *Mecca’s* inhabitants were engaged in commercial activities and they had a good scope for their economic enterprises. *Ka’aba* as a sacred place is located in *Mecca* and people come to this city for pilgrimage. Therefore, it was a great centre of peace and tranquility. Nomads who were coming to this city from distant areas found it a

\(^{13}\) Ibid., vol. 103, p. 17.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
safe place for commercial purposes. In fact, the livelihood in the area of Mecca was obtained by pasturing of camels and sporadic agriculture. The inhabitants of Mecca apparently went on changing afterwards from the less profitable trade to the more profitable ones. Therefore, the kinds of goods under transaction also went on changing from animals such as camels to the commerce. In fact, the society of Mecca also changed in due course of time.

W. Montgomery Watt says that:

"Mohammad’s contemporaries may not have been more than one generation removed from at least a partial dependence on pastoralism; Mohammad’s grandfather appears to have had extensive herds of camels. In Mohammad’s time, however, many of the residents in Mecca must have gained a livelihood mainly from commercial operations. Thus, in the course of a generation or two there had been a change from reliance on nomadic pastoralism to reliance on commerce".\(^{15}\)

At the time when Prophet was chosen as a messenger of God, tribal integrity was getting weakened. The reason was that society had been shifting away from a situation in which tribal community was based upon kinship affinities, towards a society based upon gaining most profit.\(^{16}\) In the latter, they had to face individualism, for in such a situation everybody sought his own benefit through commercial activity. In this kind of society gaining as much

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\(^{16}\) Probably it is this shift from tribal security to commercial individualism which was the basis of wahabi movement which has occurred in the Islamic world at different historical times.
money as possible overshadowed all other relationships, and those who were to be able to obtain more benefit had more power as well. Those pre-commercial relations which had existed among the people provided social security. Bryan Turner says:

"Whereas in the desert context the individual had been bound by tribal custom and his status determined by birth and adherence to muruwwa, the Meccan economy stimulated individualism and achievement motivation. Furthermore, there were fewer limits on the acquisition of personal wealth. There was a natural limit to the number of camels a Bedouin could control and to the number of camel supervisors, he could hire, but in the capital city of Mecca, luxury goods and precious metals magnified personal wealth with the result that society became more diversified and stratified. Orphans, widows and old people could no longer count on the protection of kin as tribal customs became disrupted, and found themselves increasingly subject to purely market mechanisms. The tribe as the main unit of social life was replaced by the clan as the organ of social control, but this unit in return was replaced by client - patron relationship which cut across ascribed kin status."

While this situation was emerging in Mecca, Prophet himself was preoccupied with trade. The life of the Prophet Mohammad is well-known. Mohammad Ibn Abdullah was born in the clan of Hashim of Quraysh tribe in

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17 *Muruwwa* the Arab means all those virtues which are found in the tradition of his people, constitute the fame of an individual or the tribe to which he belongs: the observance of those duties which are connected with family ties, the relationship of protection and hospitality and the fulfillment of great law of blood revenge. — quoted from Bryan Turner, *Weber and Islam*, p. 30.

57 A.D. He was either orphaned at his earlier age or was born after the death of his father. He was under the care of his grandfather, Abd-ul-Muttalih. According to the tradition of Meccan upper class families, the new born was given to a wet-nurse of the nomadic tribes. Bryan Turner says:

"By the age of eight years, Muhammad had lost both his mother and grandfather. He was consequently placed under the protection of his uncle, Abu-Talib, with whom tradition has it that Muhammad made a journey to Syria. During his early manhood, Muhammad acted as an agent for the widow of a Meccan merchant. Khadijah who was apparently impressed by his honesty and thrift and proposed a marriage which Muhammad accepted when he was twenty-five". 19

It was after his marriage that Prophet Mohammad found opportunity to think about restlessness of Meccan society and as Turner says this marriage introduced Mohammad to the rising elite of financiers and traders. 20

In the history of the Pristine Islam, commercial affairs had a crucial role in the Arab Peninsula. As we mentioned earlier the city of Mecca had been an important centre for trade and commercial activities. Mohammad, before his Prophetic Period, was engaged in trade and he had brought about a considerable benefit for Khadija who later became his wife. It is clear that Prophet should have been well-acquainted person with trade in his pre-Prophetic period. In fact, during that period, Mecca was a safe area for the

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19 Ibid., p.31.
20 Ibid., p.32. The charitable donations which are enjoined upon the faithful in Islam probably stemmed from the need to provide for the poor people in the world which was assuming a commercial character.
commercial activities.

Bryan Turner, one of the well-known scholars in this subject, expresses the view that early Islam was a triumph of Meccan merchants and financiers over tribal anarchy and also he suggests that Quran is penetrated by the language of commerce. He says that while the warrior stratum may have been recruited from the desert nomad, Islamic leadership came from the merchant elite of Mecca.\textsuperscript{21} In his views on Islamic commercialism, Turner writes:

"with the rise of a mercantile bourgeois class, there was a great emphasis on those aspects of the Quran and hadith which legitimised and encouraged business activity. The fact that early Islam permitted trade and business, albeit within the restrictions placed on certain forms of usury was no longer sufficient; for certain social groups, trade came to be regarded as a religious calling".\textsuperscript{22}

When Turner discusses about ideas of scholars like Richard Steele and Mohammad Shaibani on the subject, he comes to the conclusion that there grew up a popular tradition to the effect that the honest merchant was more pleasing to Allah than the government servants.\textsuperscript{23}

In the study of the relationship between religion and economy some scholars discuss about those religious factors which played a predominant role as obstacles to economic development in Islamic society. Max Weber on this

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp.141-2.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p.142.
issue says that it is not easy for authentic religions of faith to generate anti-traditionalist, rational trends of the patterning of life. In the nature of the case these religions lack any drive toward the rational control and transformation of the world. This statement by Weber needs a modification in terms of the following. There are various evidences which show that Islam has focussed its attention on the economic life of its followers in the world. In fact, the main part of the Islamic system in economic life is the element of work. This element enters into every relationship of economic life of the people and defines it as lawful or unlawful.

The importance of work is based on those statements by Prophet and Shia Imams who make clear obligation of Muslim in his life. In the history of early Islam, one can witness the emergence of Islam as a great civilization which spread over a vast area ranging from Spain to India. The genesis of civilization was not simply because of invasion of Arabs in territories of alien religions. A civilization should have a strong core through which its advocates could propagate its achievements in the external world. Islamic civilization was, in fact, the continuation of prophetic emphasis on this-worldly activities. The religion of Islam had emerged in the big city of Mecca and evolved in the city of Medina. This event has to be taken into account as a significant one while emphasizing the religion in the city. Prophet Mohammad usually was urging people to be careful about gardens around the city of Medina. Sir. H. Gibb on Islamic civilization says that:

"The contrast which exists between the rural community and the city in every society was rarely more striking than medieval Islamic world. Here it was not merely a contrast between isolation and congregation, between the dispersed economy of the village and the concentrated economy of the town, between oppressed poverty and relative freedom and wealth, between producer and consumer. but it was a contrast of civilizations. The medieval Muslim culture was above all an urban culture".25

In Islamic cities we witness the existence of bazar near mosque and also the involvement of traders near mosque where they perform their religious duties. Traders and merchants were known in their own cities as traders as well as religious persons. Their religious duties comprised collective prayer, helping poor people and paying religious tax. Existence of mosque near bazar was an important place which had originated in early Islam, when Prophet recommended Friday prayer as the day of congregation for weekly market. In the period of Pristine Islam the economic and religious life of the people had a close interaction with each other. Merchants and traders had prospered a great deal in Islam. The city of Mecca, the birth place of the new religion, was already an important centre of trade in which different markets were organized. Friday was chosen as the day of congregational prayer, because on that day, people from distant areas used to gather in the weekly market in that city for their business activities.

Thus, the reform of the world as envisaged by *Mohammad* included the reform of the *bazaar* as the main arena of extrafamilial sociability and the main public centre of the community of believers (*Ommay*). When Weber attributes to Islamic cities only a political function, he makes a mistake about early Islamic history. He states: “Judaism and Christianity were specifically civic and urban religions, but the city had only political importance for Islam”. In fact, there is a difference between cities as religious, economic and social centres in Islam on the one hand and cities in the *patrimonial* sense on the other hand. The latter were obviously related to dynasties, which used to come to power through military conquest. Weber does not make a distinction between patrimonial and non patrimonial dimensions of society.

In fact, the Islamic history witnessed the rise of various problems in societies, which have not been related to Islam at all. Patrimonialism is one of such problems that tied itself to the Islamic societies. Apparently it was from this very point that even other problems of Islamic societies came into prominence. Study of the history of Islamic civilization will take us to the opposite side of Weber’s point of view. In fact, a researcher who wants to examine those problems which have come into existence in Islamic society, should start his study from this point. In the same way, Bryan Turner suggests that:

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“During the first three centuries of Islam, there was an enormous ethical, artistic and industrial inventiveness and expansion; consequently, there were available a range of vocabularies of motives for describing, elaborating and justifying new activities and underlining old ones. With the emergence of a foreign military elite, the growth of patrimonialism and the curtailment of Islamic conquest, the social status of the middle classes was gradually eliminated. In addition, Islam was, in the early middle ages, threatened by the Crusades, the Mongols and by internal dissent. Faced by these problems, the patrimonial leadership sought for an articulated orthodoxy, indoctrination and social control”.

Consideration on economic activity can be based upon statements (hadith), expressed by Prophet. This aspect shows that the faithful has an attitude towards the trade and also he has to conduct his occupational duties exactly according to a certain procedure by which he kept from falling into unlawful transaction (Haram). Work within the ethical ambit is emphasized by Islam; thereby life of the Muslim individual is guaranteed and Muslim society has access to the requirements of material life.

Since man in Islam is permitted to live in the world he can have access to worldly affluences as well. This religion does not advise seclusion to man, rather, recommends reaping the benefits of the world. Riches of the world have to be created for the public and the exploitation of these blessings is a

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29 In this chapter we mentioned some of statements from prophet on earning lawful livelihood. As such, two other statements that we may refer are as follows: Prophet says that “worship has seventy parts, the preferable among them is the part of earning lawful livelihood.” (Mohammad Baqer Mujilisi, op.cit., vol.103,p.17). In the next *Hadith prophet* says that “the worship has ten parts, nine portion of it is earning lawful livelihood (Ibid.).
necessary and natural requirement. *Holy Quran* says that “who has prohibited divine beauties and pure sustenances which God has created for his servants”? There are various evidences through which the isolation of the world has been reproached and there is also strong prohibition against monastic life and mortification. *Quran* tells the faithful: do not forbid those things that God has legitimated to you. Further, “If the possessor remains thankful to God, in return God will reward him with more wealth”. In the other quotation *Imam Sadiq*, Shia's sixth infallible Imam, asked people to “request from God, wealth and health in this world, salvation and heaven in the hereafter”.

While Islam allows the pursuit of wealth, it enjoins upon the faithful to meet the religious obligations such as *khoms* or alms and charities. *Holy Quran* tells the faithful: “do not use the wealth of each other unlawfully”. The wealth is what the God has bestowed upon man, however God invites His servant to pay heed to the plight of poor people from the same possession. In Islam private property is accepted and everybody is given right to acquire his own wealth and property legitimately. But at the same time, the owner should be charitable in order to lessen the plight of poor people; “those who are parsimonious and do not pay the right of poor people from the wealth which God of His grace had bestowed upon them, should not be supposed to think

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30 *Quran*, 7:32.

31 Ibid., 5:87.

32 Ibid., 14:7.


34 *Quran*, 2:188.
that this parsimony is to their advantage".35 As such, in other verses of the Holy Quran God advises the faithful to donate from his own wealth for charity. The prophet said "there is nothing wrong in wealth for him who fears God".36 These kinds of trades and transactions are lawful so long as the trader does act according to Islamic economic injunctions.

There is a long discussion on existence and autonomy of guilds in Islamic cities in medieval period. Some scholars believe that the kind of independent character is not to be found among the corporations. They mostly talk of authorities like muhtasib and Arif who were controlling the bazar and transactions. Dominique Sourdel says that "we know that the artisans from the towns, grouped in guilds, were often shopkeepers at the same time. manufacturer of small objects also saw to their retail sale, and the merchants of a given product were installed near each other in the same place".37 At the same time, the author adds that:

"We know of guilds then, which each had a kind of agent to represent it, generally called arif, but the craftsmen remained no less under the direct control of the authorities and in particular of the muhtasib. Thus the members of a profession never seem to have enjoyed any advantage, and still less the right to admit a newcomer into their midst by an initiation ceremony".38

Existence of guild in Islamic cities of medieval period is an accepted

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36 Farhad Nomani and Ali Rahnema, op. cit., p.22.
38 Ibid.
issue but the subject discussed is the extent of autonomy in *guilds*. Marshal Hodgson says that in the middle period traders in a common profession had their own shop near each other in a given area but they were under supervision of government. In response to that supervision sometimes they had regular *guild* life.\(^{39}\) He also says that “The several quarters of a city reflecting different crafts groups sometimes”\(^{40}\)

Since in medieval period there was an alliance between patrimonial rulers and *Olama*, therefore government in congruent with *Olama* was proceeding to control of *bazars*. Therefore, government agent - *muhtasib* - was appointed to supervise the right way of transactions in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence throughout the *bazar*. Reuben Levy says that “The *guilds* had their own officers who saw to internal discipline, but the religio-political authority also appointed the *muhtasib*, whose function it was to see that all trading was honest and the laws of Islam not infringed”\(^{41}\)

In the medieval cities of Islam the existence of craft *guilds* and trade *guilds* is assumed, but that argument which discusses about the extent of autonomy on *guilds* may continue to be valid.

Trade and commercial activities should not cause religious indifference.


\(^{40}\) Ibid.

In fact, God wants from faithful that if he is engaged in certain trade, he should not neglect God. In Quran it is said that, "o' thou! faithful, while you be proclaimed to Friday prayer, you try to worship and leave your business, this will be better for you, if you understand. Then, once prayer comes to an end, again you return to your business activity, scattered on the land, seek sustenance from the grace of God and much remember God".\(^{42}\) Muslim in his economic activity should not take unlawful profit or usury. Without discussing in detail about the prohibition of usury in Islam, this view can only be expressed here that benefit should be obtained through the work and certain activity. Islamic code prohibits interest which is obtained on investment made without personal risk or involvement of work. Thus, bank investment for interest is not favoured. Profit taking in business is permitted as there is personal risk and engagement in work. However, in 1952 Al-Azhar University in Cairo lifted the ban on *Riba* thus permitting Muslims to draw interest from banks, if they prefer. Quran says "those who eat usury, will not rise in the resurrection unless like the one who has become mad for the Satanic Whimsy".\(^{43}\)

In the same way, God invites the faithful to help poor people by charity and also to take away from usury “God annihilates the interest of usury and increases the wealth that its part is paid as charity”.\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\) *Quran*, 62: 9-10.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 2:275.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 2:276.
wealth for the religious and charitable purposes. God is pleased so that this
section of wealth belongs to Himself and also his *prophet*. Therefore, God
encourages the faithful to pay a share of his possession for the people in the
poor condition "o. thou! Faithful people, whatever booty and benefit reach to
you, *Khoms* - one fifth - of it is special to God, *Prophet*, his relatives, orphans,
poor people and those who have become helpless in travel, then give them".45

In other verse also God says to His Prophet that “Perform your duty on
the rights pertained to observation of bonds of relationship and rights of poor
people. Because these two are better for those who are eager to visage the
God”.46 In the next verse to the above quotation again God talks of usury-*riba*.
He says that “the interest which you gave as a usury will increase nothing near
God. The reward of charity that you gave to poor people, eagerly and sincerely,
will become manifold, and those are the very charitable persons who make
increase their own wealth”.47 In fact, Islam does not oppose freedom of trade
and commerce,48 but at the same time, it declares that to achieve this no one
should prevent the Muslim from his duty of worship. *Quran* calls the faithful to
business and trade, but reminds him that he ought not to forget his
responsibility to God.49

Islam considers *work* as very important and hence, it has concentrated

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on the circumstances which come into existence through the work situations. In the Islamic tradition there are various narratives - *hadith* - which have made clear different facets of life in the world. In this respect we may divide these narrations into four major sections as follows: *ibadāt* or worships, *muamelat* or transactions, *munakehāt* or family laws, and *uqubāt* or punishments. One of the four main parts of the narrative, is pertain to transactions. This aspect covers whole economic topics.\(^5\)

**Role of Bazar**

This part of the study has been devoted to examine the relationship between religion and trade in Iranian society. It would be suitable to have a glance at the position of market in Iran which calls *bazar*. In fact, in the economy of Iran, *bazar* has a crucial importance and bears a close relationship with religion. Ahmad Ashraf in the definition of *bazar* says: “Iranian *Bazar* is a unified, self-contained building complex of shops, passage ways, and caravanserais, interspersed with squares (*meydān*), religious buildings, bathhouses (*hammam*), and other public institutions”.\(^5\)

Across the *bazar* there are various mosques, religious schools (*madrasas*), mausolea and other religious buildings. Also in the area of *bazar* there are endowments of property (*waqf*). Usually big mosque where Fiday prayers are held is part of the *bazar*, in most of the cities in Iran. Charitable and pious merchants have often provided the funds for constructing mosque or

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\(^5\) Ehsan Yarshater (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.21.
madrasa in the bazar. In the society of Iran bazar is a social institution wherein there is an interaction among religious, commercial, political and social elements.

Indeed, bazar displays the situation of an Islamic society, because it is a macro-center in the middle of the city which has religious, commercial, political and communicative functions on its own face. Various kinds of activities are being done in the bazar. Even bazar plays an important role in respect to its adjoining villages in the rural area. Since there is no much to make use of the markets, villagers come to the cities for the purpose of trade and transaction. As we mentioned earlier, there are various mosques in the bazar that bazaris usually go for collective prayer to one of these mosques, usually the nearer one.

Apart from daily prayers, bazaris have some other religious programmes which are weekly and they also participate in these programmes headed by a cleric who delivers a speech for the audience and there also may be recitation – tilavat – of Quran and ceremony for commemoration of the martyrs of Karbela. Programmes of Moharram are spread in the bazar and the lamentation programmes in the days of Tasooa and Ashoora reach the peak. People come from different areas of the city to participate in the Moharram processions in the bazar. The political functions of bazar area which have

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52 The same situation has been observed by the researcher in the relationship between the city of Kashan and adjoining villages.
been crucial in the history of Iran. have been associated closely with the religion. It was during these programmes such as mentioned above that political decisions have been made and the important aspect is that these decisions were to be made in consultation with religious leaders. It was in this way that in case of necessity, mobilization of people was to be carried out in order to gather and protest against the political rulers. The most drastic way is that when bazaris make political decisions they close the shops completely. The result of this kind of strike over the economic conditions is obviously much influential.

Ahmad Ashraf says "Lambton observed that 'the anti-ascetic attitude of Islam contributed to the growth of the merchant community and helped to raise the status of the merchant. Man's salvation was, broadly speaking, to be ensured not by withdrawal from the world, .... but by integrity and moderation in the conduct of the affairs of this world'".\(^{53}\) On the close ties between religion and commerce, the author says that "the bazar was, hence, basically a religious and commercial whole. While commercial transaction 'is the raison d'être for the existence of the bazar'. as G. Thaiss pointed out in his observations on the bazar of Tehran, 'the religious idiom is the basic common denominator in the bazar and functions to create crosscutting ties and bonds among bazaris of different guilds and professions' "\(^{54}\)

Of significant localities in bazar is mosque. Throughout the bazar in


\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 31.
cities there are various mosques where hazari people attend to collective prayer. Big mosques of each city are usually located in the bazar and they are well known to hold celebrated religious programmes. The alliance between bazar and mosque has played a very significant part in communal life of the city residents. Suffice it to say that this combination had a political implication in the history of Iran. One of the major factors that had an influential role in the revolution of Iran was hazars’ numerous strikes that have been led through mosques.

One major difference between Iran and North African Islamic countries is a kind of distinction which exists between rural and urban areas. It seems that unlike Iran with Shia ideology in North African Muslim states the political protests are usually from rural areas where Sufis wield power. To explain this phenomenon, Ernest Gellner in his book Muslim Society says that “The real clue is, I suspect, that the orders and systems of saintly allegiance were essentially far too segmented and particularistic to serve as bases or even vehicles for national feeling. They really were spiritual tribes, not spiritual nations”. After making a connection between nationalism and protestantism in Europe and North Africa Gellner suggests that in Europe Protestantism broke up the unity of spiritual super-state “whereas in North Africa it was through its overcoming, segmented, minuscule spiritual tribes, substates”.

Ibid.
If tribesmen come to saint it is for political leadership and on the other hand, if townsfolk come to saint it is for spiritual purpose. Political act forms outside the city in tribal areas and those opponent religious leaders live in that areas far from city as a source of threat. But in society like Iran, political protest originates from the city where religious leader has an active part to play. In societies of North Africa we see a close connection between political rulers, administration and merchants, whereas in Shia Society of Iran we encounter deep rooted interaction between religious leaders and merchants who are in opposition to political ruler. Earnest Gellner says that:

"one may rephrase this characterization in terms of the technical and institutional equipment of Muslim societies. They assumed literacy, urban life, long distance trade and central authority but they also assumed, or had to live with, the fact that the central power and the towns could not effectively control outlying tribes, though at the same time they constituted, economically, and religiously, one community with them. All these assumes a level of population which has forced enough people to live in marginal mountain and desert regions, and to be sufficiently numerous out there to constitute a threat".57

It may be pointed out here that in these kinds of societies in North Africa Ibn-e- Khaldun’s social cohesion theory may be exercised, as Gellner goes this way. Since in these societies cohesion takes form out of the society in desert and becomes a threat for the city. These societies are influenced by Sunni

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57 Ibid.
based ideology. But in Shia society it is from inside the city that opposite religious leaders come into being. In the North African societies it is tribal area that is in opposite side, but in society like Iran it is urban centre that stands against despotic ruler. In such a situation two important groups that actively declared their antagonism against government were religious leaders and tradesmen.

Ernest Gellner justifies that Sunni orthodoxy has ability to play a part only to a limited extent in political milieu. For Gellner it is Sunni legal schools which are not favoured to provide members for political leadership. He also says that it is Sufism which presents such a political theory useful for tribe, village and town. This theory remains as a threat for state and administration in the city. “The most important fact at least sociologically, seems to be the inescapable requirement of religious organisation and leadership. Formal Islam is capable of providing this only to a limited degree, as in the Ottoman Empire, by linking religious organisation with political authority”.

However, Gellner refers to Sufism that to some extent has capability to take over this duty. “Sufism provides a theory, terminology and technique of leadership far more generally usable, in tribe, village or town, under government or in anarchy”. As we mentioned earlier in Shia kind of thought from early Islam there was a confrontation between Shi‘ism and central authority. According to this belief, the right to rule is only specified

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58 Ibid., p. 103.
60 Ibid., p. 104.
for Imams. Therefore, rulers are usurpers. In history Shia people have been in opposite side of every government. This is a kind of thought that actually put the faithful Shia people against the government. Therefore, traders were one of the pioneers along with religious leaders to stand out against the government.

Ernest Gellner projects a question that what were the ideological aspects in North Africa led to the difference between rural and urban areas and distinguished the role of Sufi in tribe. To answer this question he says that:

"the crucial ones are: a scriptural faith, a completed and (the final edition, so to speak) is available and there is no room for further accretion or for new prophets; also there is no warrant for clergy and hence for religious differentiation; and third, there is no need to differentiate between church and state, between what is God's and what is Caesar's, since it began as a religion of rapidly successful conquerors, who soon were the state".60

Therefore, as Gellner emphasizes, in North African Islamic cities there is a common objective between rulers, administrators and merchants and the opposition to them came from rural dwelling Sufis.

To articulate the alliance of bazar and mosque in Shia Society, one should seek the interaction between bazar and Olama – religious leaders. For this purpose, one significant notion is to comprehend the Shia belief about administration. As we mentioned earlier, according to this belief system, patrimonial rulers are not legitimated. Although administration may be accepted superficially but in fact, they were quasi-legitimate.61 Traders of the

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60 Ibid., p. 100.
bazaar were paying their religious tax - Khoms - to Olama. They were helping the construction of mosques and religious schools (Madrasas) in the bazaar and elsewhere, that in a sense were bases for Olama to serve as both the religious and political act.

The interaction between religious leaders and merchants has a large history in the society of Iran. As we mentioned earlier, merchants were those who transact according to religious law-Sharia- and they have firmly believed in their position in accordance with Prophet's statements about legitimate occupation. At the same time, they were well-known in their towns as religious personalities. Religious leaders, on the other hand, have needed merchant’s help, especially financial support such as paying Khoms (one fifth of the net profit). There was an alliance between the religious leaders and merchants which facilitated political mobilization. Accordingly, merchants who were against the domination of despotic rulers were not able to resist administration on their own strength. A haven was needed to lean on and the support of the religious leader was securing this need. Thus, we can see the alliance of religious leaders - merchants in the cities of Iran which supports each other in securing religious autonomy.62

Ahmad Ashraf on this alliance says that above all else, it was the dependence of the Shi‘ite establishment upon the bazar’s financial support for mosque and religious schools (Madrasas) that led to the articulation of the

62 A similar pattern exists among the Bohra Muslims of Western India (Gujarat and Maharashtra) but here the aim is social solidarity.
mosque-bazar alliance. The power, prosperity, and popularity of the Olama were related to the size and values of religious endowments under their control and the amount of Khums that they received from the bazars and others. In fact, it was through bazar which many religious activities have been taking shape across the city. Different meetings are usually held in the bazar in which various subjects are discussed. These meetings were to be held in the presence of Olama and notable merchants in mosques; many of the city inhabitants would come to the bazar to attend these meetings and be informed about their decision makings. A. Ashraf states: "The religious groups are multifaceted, informal, face-to-face groups which serve as occupational, neighbourhood, religious, interpersonal, friendship, cooperative, self-help, or political networks in various sections of the bazars and neighbourhood of different communities. Many of the functions that the guilds formerly fulfilled (were recently) being assumed by the hayats, such as helping the poor, organizing cooperative relief efforts..., helping bankrupt merchants... and collecting funds... for building schools, contributing to hospitals, and the like."  

\[\text{63} \quad \text{iibid.} \]

\[\text{64} \quad \text{In most of the time words of a clergyman with the use of Quranic verses and hadith would give a specific direction to subject under discussion of the meeting. These meetings are known as hayat. About the term hayat Ahmad Ashraf says 'The term hayat is, however, of recent usage. The religious groups, in the early 14th/20th century were called jalsa (session).'} \]

\[\text{65} \quad \text{iibid., p. 32.} \]