LABOUR

Principles and Teachings

The most important and fundamental issue of labour is that of dignity of labour and the labourer, which even in today's civilized world with the exception of a few nations such as the US and ex-Soviet Union Republics, is looked down with contempt. Despite all intellectual and cultural advancements, people are still prejudiced towards manual labourers who are given no honour at all in the society. Modern educated youth abhor even to imagine working in a profession which requires physical toil. Professions such as carpentry and architecture, though highly-paying sources of livelihood, are not considered worth-cherishing.

In many countries, including India, one of the oldest human civilizations, the entire family feels humiliated and stand outraged, if any of its member adopts the profession of handicraft. This kind of unsympathetic and antagonistic approach can never let skilled or unskilled laborers achieve recognition in the society and thereby expect better and dignified life.

Islamic Approach:

Islam's contribution among many others, to humanity is that it has eliminated all types of discriminations among human beings. All
artificial criteria of distinction, injected on the theoretical plane, the spirit of human equality and fraternity, declared, on the practical horizon, manual labour to be an honourable profession thus elevating the labourer to the new heights of dignity.

Labour, a source of service benefiting the individuals, organizations, factories and mills, is also a form of wealth consisting of both the characteristics: profit and exchange. The Quran also identifies labour as an asset like territory, property, and cash etc. Musa (Peace be upon him) had grazed the cattle of his wife to pay the latter’s dower. Shueb (Peace be upon him), father in law of Musa, addresses his son in law in these words referring to the dower to be paid to his daughter.

He said; I intend to wed one of these two daughters of mine to you, on condition that you serve me for eight years; but if you complete ten years, it will be (a favour) from you. But, intend not to place you under a difficulty. If Allah wills, you will find one of the righteous

(Quran, XXVIII: 27)

Labour, mentioned by the Quran as a significant source of earning, helps one earn wealth even without any capital being invested. The Quran describes the life of two prominent prophets, one of whom was the employer and the other his labourer, Shueb and Musa respectively. The former appoints the latter as shepherd for his cattle.
The latter, while accepting the offer, clarifies:

He (Musa) said that is settled between me and you which ever of the two terms I fulfilled, there will be no injustice to me, and Allah is surely over what we bayous.

(Quran, XXVIII: 28)

Likewise, Khizr, generally believed to have taught Musa many secrets of the Divine-plan, has been referred to in the Quran as an architect:

Then they both proceeded, till when they came to the people of town, they ask them for food but they refused to entertain them then they found there in a wall about to collapse and He (khizr) set it up straight. (Musa) said if you have wished surely, you could have taken wages for it.

(Quran, XVIII: 77)

The last Prophet himself tended goats and entered into trade on commission. He, in his later days, used to mention them proudly, adding: "worker is a friend of Allah"

LAWS OF LABOUR

Freedom of Profession:

Islamic civilization is characterized by, among other things, freedom of profession to earn livelihood, high or low. As has been repeated by mentioned above, Prophet Musa tended other's livestock for eight or ten years. Ali Reports: "I, having once learned that the Prophet (S.A.W.) was hungry, set out looking for some job to earn for
the Prophet, worked for a few in their gardens, and brought back seventeen dates, which I earned by watering the dry soil with seventeen buckets of water, in the service of the Prophet who shared the fruits with me.\(^1\)

One day the Prophet (S.A.W.), having seen unusual black spots on a Sahabi's hands, asked him whether there was written something on your palms, he replied that there was nothing scribbled but it got blackened due to hard labour involving the use of shovel to break the rocky soil, the only available source of livelihood for him and his family. This made the Prophet appreciate his hard-work by kissing his hands.\(^2\)

The Prophet (S.A.W.) taught his people not to avoid or consider a profession however mean or low. Aishah, one of the Prophet's wives reports that the Prophet (S.A.W.) on being informed that the Muslims whom he had encouraged to adopt some handicraft remained hesitant, addressed his Companions criticizing their approach of discriminating a work which he himself did, and noted in the end that he was more pious and conscious of God.\(^3\)

Thus, Islamic economy provides freedom of profession and guarantees dignity of labour.

\(^1\) Ibn Majah, Sunan, Bab al-Rajalu Yasqi Kulla Dalvin bi Tamari
\(^2\) Ibn Athir, Usudal, Ghaba - under sad al Ansari
\(^3\) Al-Bukhari, op.cit.; also Muslim, op.cit.,
Labour Charges:

Labour-wage has its comprehensive impact on the society of which the labourers are bonafide members whose standard of living remains low following less income. Consequently, the whole nation will get adversely affected since everywhere the workers, whether skilled or unskilled, account for the majority of the population.

Economists have differed in opinion over how much the labourers are to be paid for their labour. Nothing final has been determined. But the underlying spirit in Islamic economics seeks to encourage the employer to increase the amount of the wages of the labourer to enable him to get his basic needs fulfilled. One can assess the high value of this Islamic directive from the following statement of the Prophet (S.A.W.):

"They (slaves) are your brethren who have been placed under you. So, whoever has been made by Allah the master of his brother, he should feed the latter what he himself eats, and clothe him what he himself wears; and you should not assign him a work beyond his capacity, rather you should help him in such kind of burden."

From this ruling four principles can easily be inferred:

1. The employer should consider and treat the employee like his brother.

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2. The level of the economic standards of the two should be the one and the same. The former has to ensure that the latter should get the same food and clothing as he prefers for himself.

3. Nature and time of work allocated to labourer should not be tiresome or beyond his natural capacity.

4. Exacting and tiring tasks could also be entrusted to the servant but he should be provided cooperation as much as possible.

Answer to the question as to how much burden or how many hours of daily work should be fixed for workers could be derived from this Hadith:

Someone asked the Prophet (S.A.W.) "which act is the most rewarding in the eyes of Allah?" The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: "Regular one even although little. Select what you can perform easily."

It should be the principle. If the number of workers out number the available opportunities of work, the wage-rate decreases. It is not only the economists' view but also a general observation. The solution to this problem is free movement of workers within and without the country. If a worker wants to move to another place in a bid to earn more, he should be allowed to do so. This emigration of workers will help maintain the wage-rate. On the other hand the

\[5 \text{i} \text{bid}, \text{Kitab al-Riqaq} \]
government is bound to help unemployed workers and the poor classes through the Zakat system. The Quran provides a principle related to the free movement of workers:

*The who emigrates (from) his home) in the cause of Allah, will find on earth many dwelling places and plenty to hire by. And whosoever haves his home as an immigrates into Allah and his messengers, and death over takes him, his reward is then surely in combent upon Allah. And Allah is ever oft-forgiving, most merciful.*

(Quran, IV: 100)

After World War I Britain issued an insurance scheme for the unemployed workers, which was based on Sir William Sewerage's proposals and suggestions. All of these advices were already parts of the Islamic system of economy. Second Caliph, "Umar had made several efforts to determine how much could be sufficient for one time’s meal so that the daily allowance to the poor could be disbursed. Islam believes that every living being is provided sustenance by Allah (S.W.T.) who exhorts in the Quran:

"Do not kill your children out of fear of poverty. We provide for them sustenance as well as for you".

(Quran XVII: 31)

"We distributed among them their sustenance in this worldly life".

(Quran, XLIII: 32)
Islamic government could use Zakat and other kind of development tax to fulfil the responsibility of ensuring the poor's livelihood.\(^6\) Zakat is mainly to help less fortunate people:

"The Sadaqat are only for the poor and the needy, and those who collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free the captives, and the debtors, and for the cause of Allah. Allah is All knowing and All-wise".

(Quran, IX: 60)

Abu Masud al-Ansari reports that if the Prophet (S.A.W.) made an appeal for contribution, we would go to the market to look for some work of loading and unloading market-stuffs, and get enough quantity of food-grain out of which we would give Sadaqah and use for our own food.\(^7\)

Hajjaj b. Yusuf, the then governor of Iraq, directed the managers of building department to fix the daily wages of the workers according to their daily food-expenses. On this formula a Canal, which had been left incomplete during Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas's period, was completed.\(^8\)

It was due to the fair and just system of wage disbursement of Islam that the people who were hungry, wearing tattered pieces of clothes and walking long distances without any source of

\(^6\) M Hamidullah, Islamic Solution of the Basic Economic Problems', in Islamic Culture, dated 10th April 1930.
\(^7\) Al-Bukhari, op. cit., Kitab al-Salam
\(^8\) Al-Baladhuri, op. cit., p 274, Battle of Jalula.
conveyance, in the beginning of the Islamic period, turned affluent in the Pious Caliphate's time.

**Owner-Labour Relations:**

Employer-worker relationship has been mentioned in the Quran in a highly unheard of manner. The qualities a worker is suggested to possess are strength and honesty:

"And said one of them (the two women) O my father hire him verily, the best of men for you to hire is the strong, the trustworthy"  
(Quran, XXVIII 26)

And the quality of the employer is justice:

"He said, I intend to wed one of these two daughters of mine to you, on condition that you serve me for eight years, but if you complete ten years, it will be (a favour) from you But, intend not to place you under a difficulty If Allah wills, you will fine one of the righteous"  
(Quran, XXVIII 27)

These two instances from the Quran summarize the mode of relationship between an employer and his worker. It could also be made the basis for all kinds of complications arising from the workplace.

A Hadith further explain the matter: "Every Muslim is the brother of another Muslim who does not do any wrong to his brother."

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9 Al-Bukhari, *op cit*, Kitab al-Mazalim wal-Qasas, also Muslim, *op cit*, Kitab al-Birr
"None of you is sincere in his claim of being faithful unless he desires for his brother what he desire for himself." A person came to Prophet (S.A.W.) and asked how many times he should forgive his slave for his mistakes. The Prophet kept silent but when the man repeated his enquiry, the Prophet said: "Every day seventy (70) times."

According to old Arabic usage the number 70 referred to very many times. By application of the above principles the ever-widening gap between the employer and the worker could easily and successfully be abridged.

**Prophet's Treatment of His Attendants:**

Anas, who had served the Prophet (S.A.W.) for over ten years, reports: after the Prophet (S.A.W.) settled in Madinah, Abu Talhah brought me to him and said: "O Prophet of Allah! this is Anas, an intelligent boy, he will serve you as an attendant. I served the Prophet at home as well as in travels and he never criticized the work I did, and never called for an explanation for what I could not do." Anas

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11 Al-Tarmidhi, *op.cit.*, Abwab al-Birr wal-Silah.
says in another report: "I remained ten years in the Prophet's service, and he never said fie and never questioned me why or why not".\(^\text{13}\)

The Prophet (S.A.W.) used to visit sick attendants. Once he went to see an ailing Jewish lad who was his servant.\(^\text{14}\)

Although he was quite kind-hearted and generous with his attendants, in his personal matters, he was very strict in non-personal matters. He checked the accounts of Zakat Collection and called for explanation from the administrator, if there was found any irregularity.

**Justice Towards the Employee:**

Islam has urged its followers to be just in their dealing with their workers. The Prophet (S.A.W.) once said that he would stand as an enemy against three categories of people, on the Day of Judgment. The third one was described by the Prophet (S.A.W.) in these words:

"The one who hires a worker, gets his work done but does not pay to him his wages."\(^\text{15}\) The Prophet directed his people: "Pay the labourer's wage before his sweat dries."\(^\text{16}\) And the Prophet prohibited

\(^{13}\) *Ibid*, Kitab al-Adab
\(^{14}\) *Ibid*, Kitab al-Salat
\(^{15}\) Al-Bukhari, *op cit*, Kitab al-Salam
\(^{16}\) Al-Baihaqi, *Sunan*, Kitab al-Ijarah
the hiring of a worker and assigning him the work without agreeing on the amount of wage.

**Government Intervention:**

In case of any problem of stand off between workers and the employer, the Islamic administration has full right to intervene.

Al-Mawardi writes: "If a person metes out any injustice to his worker, that he, pays less wage or allocates extra or excess work, the administrator will check and warn him. If the worker is doing wrong, that is, he works less but demands more wage, he will be prevented and warned. If the row continues, the government authority will decide the case.  

The government has also the responsibility to monitor the master-servant relationship. Abu Masood al-Ansari says: I was one day beating my slave, I heard a voice: "Abu Mas'oood, beware, Allah is more powerful." I looked back, it was the Prophet (S.A.W.), I immediately declared: O Prophet of Allah! I set this slave free, now to seek the pleasure of Allah." The Prophet said: "If you did not do that,

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hell-fire would burn you.\textsuperscript{18} 'Umar had a routine to make a round of suburban areas of Madinah every Saturday, if he found any slave toiling under the heavy burden of his work, he would help him.\textsuperscript{19}

Al-Mawardi rules: "It is the duty of the administrator to call for an explanation from the masters who are found wronging their slaves, and to ask them not to put more burden on them."\textsuperscript{20}

**Share in Profits:**

In order that the employer-worker relation get consolidated and for the worker to get motivated to contribute more towards productivity, the proposal of share in profits seems to be very effective. This scheme seeks to get at least one part of the entire profits caused by workers but owned by the employer distributed among the workers.\textsuperscript{21}

Abu Hurairah reports: "The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: when anyone of you is served a meal by his slave, if he does not allow him to sit with him, he should give him some portion as he (slave) has devoted his energy to prepare it."\textsuperscript{22}

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\textsuperscript{18} Muslim, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{19} Malik b. Anas, op cit
\textsuperscript{20} Al-Mawardi, op cit, Chap II, p 12
\textsuperscript{21} Tasg, op cit, vol II, pp 335-36.
\textsuperscript{22} Al-Bukhari, op cit
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What one can infer from this prophetic directive is that the worker be also given a share in the produce i.e. the profit, besides his wage.

Profit sharing scheme, if properly implemented, could prove a catalyst in the work place. It will serve as an impetus for the better performance, which will certainly lead to increase in productivity, and will also cause the negative elements like dishonesty, irregularity, cheating, and rivalry etc. to disappear. As a matter of fact, the existing system in which the worker is tightened from all sides results not only in material or monetary loss but also spiritual, intellectual, and moral hazards.