

3. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH IN ISLAM

If we consider the injunctions of the Quran, it would appear that the system for the distribution of wealth laid down by Islam envisages three objects:

a) The establishment of a practicable system of economy:

The first object of the distribution of wealth is that it would be the means of establishing in the world a system of economy which is natural and practicable, and which, without using any compulsion or force, allows every individual to function in a normal way according to his ability, his aptitude, his own choice and liking, so that his activities may be more fruitful, healthy and useful. And this cannot be secured without a healthy relationship between the employer and the employee, and without the proper utilization of the natural force of supply and demand. That is why Islam does admit these factors. A comprehensive indication of this principle is to be found in the following verse.

The condition of proper utilization has been assumed because it is possible to make an improper use of forces as it has been in the case of capitalism. Islam has struck at the very root of such an improper use and has thus eradicated the unbridled exploitation of private property.

“We have distributed their livelihood among them in worldly life, and have raised some above others in the matter of social degrees, so that some of them may utilize the services of others in their work” (43:32).

b) Enabling every one to get what is rightfully due to him:

The second object of the Islamic system of the distribution of wealth is to enable everyone to get what is rightfully his. But in Islam the concept and criteria of this right is somewhat different from what it is in other systems of economy. Under materialistic economic systems, there is only one way of acquiring the right to wealth and that is a direct participation in the process of production.

In other words, only those factors that have taken a direct part in producing wealth are supposed to be entitled to a share in wealth and no other. On the contrary, the basic principle of Islam in this respect is that wealth is in principle the property of Allah Himself and He alone can lay down the rules as to how it is to be used. So according to the Islamic point of view, not only those who have directly participated in the production of wealth but also those to whom Allah has made it obligatory upon others to help, are the legitimate sharers in wealth. Hence, the poor, the helpless, the needy, the paupers and the destitute - they too have a right to wealth. For Allah has made it obligatory on all those producers of wealth among whom wealth is in the first place distributed that they should pass on to them some part of their wealth. And the Quran makes it quite explicit that in doing so they would not be obliging the poor and the needy in any way, but only discharging their obligation, for the poor and the needy are entitled to a share in wealth as a matter of right. Says the Quran:

“In their wealth there is a known right for those who ask for it and those who have need for it” (70:24-25).

In certain verses, this right has been defined as the right of Allah. For example:

“And pay what is rightfully due to Him on the day of harvesting” (6:142).

The word “right” in these two verses makes it clear that participation in the process of production is not the only source of the right to wealth and that the needy and the poor have as good a right to wealth as its primary owners. Thus Islam proposes to distribute wealth in such a manner that all those who have taken a part in production should receive the reward for their contribution to the production of wealth, and then all those too should receive their share that Allah has given a right to wealth.

c) Eradicating the concentration of wealth:

The third object of the distribution of wealth, which Islam considers to be very important, is that wealth, instead of becoming concentrated in a few hands, should be allowed to circulate in the society as widely as possible, so that the distinction between the rich and the poor should be narrowed down as far as is natural and practicable. The attitude of Islam in this respect is that it has not permitted any individual or group to have a monopoly over the primary sources of wealth, but has given every member of society an equal right to derive benefit from them. Mines, forests, un-owned barren lands, hunting and fishing, wild grass, rivers, seas, spoils of war etc., all these are primary sources of wealth. With respect to them, every individual is entitled to make use of them according to his abilities and his labor without anyone being allowed to have any kind of monopoly over them.

“So that this wealth should not become confined only to the rich amongst you” (59:7).

Beyond this, wherever human intervention is needed for the production of wealth and a man produces some kind of wealth by deploying his resources and labor, Islam gives due consideration to the resources and labor thus deployed and recognizes man's right of property in the wealth produced. Every one shall get his share according to the labor and resources invested by him. Says the Quran:

“We have distributed their livelihood among them in worldly life, and have raised some above others in the matter of social degrees, so that some of them may utilize the services of others in their work” (43:32).

But, in spite of this difference among social degrees or ranks certain injunctions have been laid down in order to keep this distinction within such limits as are necessary for the establishment of a practicable system of economy, so that wealth should not become concentrated in a few hands.

Of these three objects of the distribution of wealth, the first distinguishes an Islamic economy from socialism, the third from capitalism, and the second from both at the same time.