

Fair Trade and Islam : A Parallel Journey

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Abstract : Fair trade is an organized social movement through wider network of producers, importers, retailers and consumers who are thinking globally to promote trading partnership of products, based on mutually agreed upon condition, accountability & transparency, social justice and equity for livelihood sustainability and economic development by creating fairer and better conditions of trade. It secures the rights of marginalized producers and workers especially, in the underdeveloped and developing countries in order to help them move from a position of vulnerability to security and economic self-sufficiency, supporting environmentally feasible, socially acceptable and economically viable production and distribution of Fair Trade labeled and unlabeled goods. Again Islam urges on establishing Adl, Ehsan and eliminating Julum and Haram from trade and business to establish peace and prosperity in the society. This paper attempts to draw a line of linkage between fair trade and Islam. It also has the endeavour to unveil that the guidelines in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah are the roots and indications of Fair trade. Moreover, the principles of fair trade which are focused now have pronounced in Islam long ago. Archive method of study has been followed to conduct the research through pursuing Quran, Sunnah, different books, journals and web materials. A

substantial number of researchers have focused issues related to business ethics and Islam but the issue of Fair trade and Islam has got very little attention by the early researchers. This research gap has created proclivity in the present researchers to conduct the study. This paper will be a valuable document in enriching the literature in this field and will create dimensions for further research.

Key words: Fair trade, Islam

1. Introduction

Fair trade advocates making the trade ethical, fair and equitable to safe guard the right of marginal producers. It is as an alternative approach to trading partnerships that aims to achieve the sustainable development of disadvantaged producers in the Third World (Krier, 2001). It also encourages the payment of fair wages in a local context and lays importance on safe and clean workplaces, optimum fair-trade practices encompass the development of sustainable businesses, the empowerment of marginal farmers for capacity building and opportunity creation in the long run, the fostering of well being, the establishment of political and social justice, gender equity, conservation of environment and the development of equitable trade on the basis of transparency and accountability, (Littrell and Dickson, 1999; MORI, 2000, International Fair Trade Association, 2006). Fair Trade Organizations, backed by consumers, are actively engaged in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade (<http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org>). Fair trade organizations in different parts of the world are supporting the producer organizations and groups to establish and to create a fair trade network. European and North American Fair-trade labeling bodies, non-governmental organizations and various faith-based organizations have all been instrumental in promoting fair trade. Indeed, for ethical and moral reasons, many Christian faith-based organizations have adopted a clear and unequivocal position in support of fair trade.

Islamic doctrines and teaching are supportive to Fair trade (Khan and Thant, 2008). The Holy Quran and Hadith advocate establishing ethical practices in trading, dealing with the parties involved in process from production workers to the consumers at the end. In the administration of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Khalip has and their followers reflected establishment of social justice, equity and fairness in every steps of governance including trade. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a successful trader and known for his integrity, bearing the honorific title "The

Trustworthy” or “Al-Amin”. Before his leadership trade in Mecca was full of exploitation, fraudulence, injustice. After his return to Mecca from Medina, trade was structured under a type of chiefdom and tax was (Jakat in Islam) imposed to provide care for the poor and strangers. It abased inequality in income distribution as well as created opportunity for the poor people to build capacity so that they can also start a venture and can reduce their debt burden. There are numerous Islamic teachings and instructions in the area of trade and business ethics indeed there are extensive and specific collections of Hadith (narrations attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that deal exclusively with sales, trade and commercial transactions For example, Book 34 Sahih Bukhari relates to sales and trade, while Book 22 Sahih Abu Dawud deals with commercial transactions. This paper in the light of literature review from The Holly Quran and Hadiths states how Islam advocated and pioneered the concept of fair trade about fourteen century back and show arguments how the key principles upon which fair trade are established such as sustainability, fairness, equity, and workers rights focused on relevant Islamic teachings.

2. Objective of the Study

This paper attempts

- To highlight different issues of fair trade.
- To pointout how Islamic doctrins in trade foster the principles of fair trade.

3. Methodology

This Study is a desk-based and library oriented research. To find out different issues of fair trade, justification of fair trade and the Holy Quran and the Sunnah are the roots and indications of Fair trade, the authors consulted available literatures various publications, research monograms, journal and magazines in this field to make the study more informative and useful to the readers. The study has been structured in the light of the research objectives.

3. Literature on Fair Trade from General Perspective

3.1. What is fair trade?

Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect that seek greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of marginalized producers and workers especially in the South. Fair Trade Organizations, backed by consumers, are actively engaged in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and

practice of conventional international trade (<http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org>).

3.2. Fair Trade Principles

Fair trade advocates generally support the following principles and practices in trading relationships (International Fair Trade Association, 2006).

- **Creating opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers:** Fair trade is a strategy for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Its purpose is to create opportunities for producers who have been economically disadvantaged or marginalized by the conventional trading system.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Fair trade involves transparent management and commercial relations to deal fairly and respectfully with trading partners.
- **Capacity building:** Fair trade is a means to develop producers' independence. Fair trade relationships provide continuity, during which producers and their marketing organizations can improve their management skills and their access to new markets.
- **Payment of a fair price:** A fair price in the regional or local context is one that has been agreed through dialogue and participation. It covers not only the costs of production but enables production, which is socially just and environmentally sound. It provides fair pay to the producers and takes into account the principle of equal pay for equal work by women and men. Fair-trades ensure prompt payment to their partners and, whenever possible, help producers with access to pre-harvest or pre-production financing.
- **Gender equity:** Fair trade means that women's work is properly valued and rewarded. Women are always paid for their contribution to the production process and are empowered in their organizations.
- **Working conditions:** Fair trade means a safe and healthy working environment for producers. The participation of children (if any) does not adversely affect their well-being, security, educational requirements and need for play and conforms to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the law and norms in the local context.
- **Environment:** Fair trade actively encourages better environmental practices and the application of responsible methods of production.

3.3. History of Fair Trade

There are a few instances in which fair trade in the 'old moral economy' is focused on producer rights: as early as 1859, Dutch author Multatuli questioned

the injustice of the colonial and capitalist system towards commodity producers in his novel *Max Havelaar*. He also found the direct correlation between the wealth and the prosperity of Europe and the poverty of the suffering of other parts of the world (Redfern, 2002).

The first attempt to commercialize fair trade goods in Northern markets were initiated in the 1940s and 1950s by religious groups and various politically oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and SERRV International were the first, in 1946 and 1949 respectively, to develop fair trade supply chains in developing countries (International Fair Trade Association, 2005).

The current fair trade movement was shaped in Europe in the 1960s: Fair trade during that period emphasized on the slogan "Trade not Aid", gained international recognition when it was adopted by the UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) to put the emphasis on the establishment of fair trade relations with the developing world (International Fair Trade Association, 2005). The year 1965 saw the creation of the first Alternative Trading Organization (ATO). In 1969, the first World shop opened its doors in the Netherlands. The initiative aimed at bringing the principles of fair trade to the retail sector by selling almost exclusively goods produced under fair trade terms in "underdeveloped regions". The first shop was run by volunteers and was so successful that dozens of similar shops soon went into business in the Benelux countries, Germany and in other Western European countries. Their message was: give disadvantaged producers in developing countries a fair chance on the world's market, and support their self-determined sustainable development. The alternative trade movement blossomed paved the establishment of at least dozens of ATOs on both sides of the Atlantic, organized actions and campaigns attacking exploitation and foreign domination, and promoting the ideals of Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas: the right to independence and self-determination, to equitable access to the world's markets and consumers. (www.wikipedia.org)

3.4. Justification of Fair Trade

Trade can reduce poverty and contribute to sustainable development. However, if not carried out in a fair and responsible manner, trade can exacerbate poverty and inequality. For over 40 years now, Fair Trade has been highly successful in making trade activities for development. In its practices, Fair Trade takes into account social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions through a rigorous set of voluntary standards. Over 4,000 small-scale and marginalized producer groups and hundreds of thousands of workers on plantations and

factories in more than 50 developing countries participate in Fair Trade supply chains (6th WTO Ministerial conference, 2005). More than five million people farmers, workers and their families in Africa, Latin America and Asia benefit from Fair Trade and FLO aims to continually increase the number of producer groups registered to supply the international Fair-trade market. For example, the number of African Fair-trade certified organizations rose to 164 organizations of 23 countries by the end of 2006 from 42 of 12 countries in 2002 an increase of 290% February 2007(www.fairtrade.org.uk). Miles Litvinoff and Madeley (2007) mentioned 50 reasons for buying fair trade products, some of those are as below:

Back a system that benefits the poor	Pay small-scale growers a fairer price
Make trade more democratic	Help producers believe in tomorrow
Ensure a living wage to workers	Put a human face on development
Build confidence	Enjoy real quality
Give someone's health a boost	Send a child to school
Be a friend of the Earth	Make your town a fair trade town
Lift the debt burden	Reduce risk
Make transnational trade more fairly	Promote human rights
Buy into a longer-term	Bypass the middlemen
Make tomorrow's business happen today	End child exploitation
Make markets really work for the marginal people.	Rebuild lives and livelihoods
Change the world!	Send hope to a hungry country

It is estimated that due to trade restrictions in rich countries, poor countries lose out on an estimated US\$100 billion per year, which is double the amount of aid that they receive (Tiu and Heaton, 2006).

4. Fair Trade-Islamic point of view

Islamic doctrines and teaching is supportive to Fair trade (Khan and Thaut, 2008). Islamic viewpoint of fair trade by outlining the key principles upon which fair trade is established, such as sustainability, fairness, equity, and workers rights, and examines relevant Islamic teachings.

4.1. Fairness and justice in Islam

Fair trade advocates fairness and justice in trade so that poor producers can get fair treatment in trade. The basic principles of trade from an Islamic perspective are justice and fairness.

The Qur'an on several occasions states unequivocally:

"Deal not unjustly, and you shall not be dealt with unjustly" (2:279).

"God loves those who are fair and just." (49:9)

"Eat not up each other's property by unfair and dishonest means." (4:29) i.e., Avoid julum and injustice.

Along similar lines, Islam strongly discourages a monopoly, because it produces 'unlawful' profit and ensures inequality. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) therefore forbade monopolies warning "Whosoever monopolizes is a wrongdoer" (reported by Muslim). Thus, these lessons from Islam highlight Islam's compatibility with the concepts of fairness and equality central to fair trade. The Qur'an and hadith are particularly insistent on the need for justice in weights and measures. Allah warns those who take full measure but give less to others:

"Give a full measure when you measure out and weigh with a fair balance" (17:35). "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?" (83:1-4)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) instructed the owners of measures and weights, "You have been entrusted with affairs over which some nations before you were destroyed" (reported by Tirmidhi). It means that business in Islam is free from any unjust practices. The prohibitions also include Riba, Hoarding, and adulteration which are called *haram*. In this way by prohibiting mal practices *Sharriah* has created a conducive environment necessary for the establishment of justice.

4.2. Mutual respect and honesty in Islam

Islam places high importance of business manners and conduct. Leniency and politeness are foundation of good manners and key to success in this world as well as in the world hereafter. The prophet said "the best charity is that of tongue" The prophet of Islam himself was very kind in his business transactions and he advised his companions to be the same whenever they transacted and did business deals with anyone. It has been reported by Hazrat Jabuir as saying of the holy prophet (peace be upon him) "Allahs mercy is with the man who is kind

when he sells, when he buys and when he makes a claim" (Bukhari). In different verses of holy Quran like 4:77, 6:32, 7:169, 8:67 Allah emphasizes on abidance of honesty and consciousness and proper use of bounties provided by Allah (Khan and Thaut, 2008). There are several Hadiths that emphasize the honor accorded to honest and ethical traders: "A truthful and trustworthy merchant will be in the company of the Prophets, the upright and the martyrs" (narrated by Tirmidhi). Similarly, "Allah shows mercy to a man who is kind when he sells, when he buys and when he makes a claim (narrated by Bukhari).

4.3. *Adl* or social justice in Islam

Fair trade aims to create opportunities for producers and workers in poor countries who have been economically disadvantaged or marginalized by the conventional trading system and the imbalances of the global market. Concurrent with the vision of fair trade, the concept of social justice is paramount in Islam. The Islamic concept of *adl* is the combination of two facts. Firstly, balance and proportions in rights between people and secondly, giving right to everyone frankly and without hesitation. *Adl* means no *haram* to your brother. In this connection the method is that you should like the same thing for your brother what you would like for yourself and should not do something to others what you do not like to be done to you. This statement is the summery of the command that depends on the following points; Excessive praises of one's commodity: One should not praise the commodity too much. In this case one of these two things could happen.

- 1) He tells about those qualities, which are not present in the commodity. In that case this is a pure lie and if the buyer buys the commodity then this is injustice and cruelty on the part of the seller.
- 2) If all the qualities described are present in the commodity then all these praises are nonsense, absurd and foolish.

Declaring of defects of the product: The seller should declare all the defects of the product whether they are obvious or concealed. The one who will conceal shall be unjust, cruel and cheater and would be deserter of advice that well wishing of man in general and Muslim in particular is obligatory. The deceit can occur when only the good side of the commodity is shown or commodity is shown in dark or only the good unit of the pair is shown. This all amounts to cheating and the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that one who cheats in not one of us. In Islam social justice includes a fair and equitable distribution of wealth as well as protection of the weak from economic exploitation by the strong. Allah commands Muslims to stand firm for justice at all costs:

“O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both.” (4:35)

Striving for social justice involves the struggle against poverty and inequality. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “He who sleeps on a full stomach whilst his neighbor goes hungry is not one of us,” (reported by Bukhari and Muslim) and also, “If someone among you sees wrong he must right it by his hand if he can (deed, conduct, action). If he cannot, then by his tongue (speak up, verbally oppose); if he cannot, then by his gaze (silent expression of disapproval); and if he cannot, then in his heart. The last is the minimum expression of his conviction (faith, courage)” (reported by Muslim). The importance of justice as a human value is emphasized in the following verse: ***“Be just, that is closest to Godliness”. (5:8)***

Therefore, the fair trade vision of a trade system based on just social relationships between producers and workers, as well as between buyers and sellers, coincides with the teachings in Islam that instruct people to defend and pursue just economic relationships.

4.4. Ehsan or Benevolence in Islam

Ehsan means doing good; beneficence; kindness; favour; obligation, conferred benevolence, benevolent action, giving others more than their right and taking less than one's right. It is over and above justice and its importance in social life cannot be exaggerated. If *adl* is society's foundation then *ehsan* is beauty and perfection of society. If *adl* saves society from bitterness and unpleasantness then *ehsan* adds beauty and sweetness in the community. No society can function if all of its members, at all times, take their right by weighing and measuring and give others rights in exact measurement and proportion. God commanded *ehsan* together with *adl* in business too. As the Holy Quran says: ***“Verily God has enjoined justice, the doing of good, and the giving of gifts to your relatives; and forbidden indecency, impropriety and oppression.” (16:90)***

Adl is instrument of salvation and it is like some savings in the trade but *ehsan* causes prosperity in the world hereafter and profit in the trade as well. The concept of *ehsan* demands charging of price no more than what is normally charged. This also emphasises the importance of cost in determining the price of a product. So under certain circumstances if there was rise in the demand of a

product, the seller should not go for exploiting the situation and therefore, making of windfall profit. *Ehsan* also closes the doors for speculation when someone buys and stores certain commodity in anticipation of higher prices in the future. *Ehsan* also encourages generosity and kindness among the business people particularly towards the poor and the needy. So, *Ehsan* is encouraging fair trade. However, smooth functioning of business is ensured through formal rules and regulations. There is no question of morality. All efforts are devoted to get maximum profit, Islam also allows profit but with justice and benevolence (*ehsan*).

4.5. Sustainable development in the light of Islam

Fair trade aims to promote sustainable development. This includes the promotion of better environmental practices and the application of responsible methods of production. The use material harmful for environment is prohibited rather environmentally sustainable farming methods that improve soil fertility, protect farmers' health and preserve valuable ecosystems for future generations are encouraged. In this respect, fair trade finds considerable support in Islam, which supports practices and policies that promote sustainable development. Muslims believe that Allah has given mankind stewardship over the earth. Stewardship implies taking care to manage, preserve and protect the natural environment for future generations. In fact, Muslims are asked to revere the environment because the Qur'an states that:

"Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth." (40:57)

Which is emphasizing on nurturing the gifts of god. Furthermore, Islam preaches moderation in consumption for conservation, exhorts man to avoid wasteful use of natural resources, and enjoins mankind to maintain the natural balance principles important in the production of fair trade products and to the consumers who purchase them. As the Qur'an states

"It is He who created the heavens and the earth in true (proportions)" (6:3)

"Verily all things have we created in proportion and measure" (54:49)

About waste prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) strongly told to avoid waste and retorted that "He who waste resources is the friend of Evil". He also stated that Allah will take account of use of resources and you will be payable for misuse of resources during the Day of Judgment.

4.6. Trade through mutual consent and transparency in Islam

The principles of fair trade encompass transparent management and commercial relations that aim to promote fairness and respect between trading partners. Such relationships aim to provide stability and a level of security, so that producers and their marketing organizations have an opportunity to improve their management skills and access to new markets. Essential to the success of the fair trade movement, the vision extends beyond producers to involve consumers and sellers. Similarly, Islam encourages mutual consent between parties as a necessary condition for a valid business transaction. It follows, therefore, that a sale under coercion is not acceptable in Islam. Taking advantage of someone's plight and charging a high price and high interest in lending is also a form of pecuniary exploitation and as such forbidden in Islam. The Qur'an states:

"Let there be amongst you traffic and trade by mutual goodwill" (4:29)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "The sale is complete when the two parties involved depart with mutual consent" (reported by Bukhari) and "A sale is a sale only if it is made through mutual consent" (Ibn Majah). Again excess charge of interest (Riba) is illustrated as illusory and *julum* by prophet.

4.7. Protecting Exploitation in Islam

The prophet forbade the acts of intermediary intervention in an unfair way that involve exploitation of one's ignorance of market conditions. Therefore, obtaining commodities at a price that is lower than the market price and selling them onward for a high or exorbitant price is condemned. In contrast, giving good advice, for example, information relating to prevailing market prices is encouraged in Islam since neither the buyer nor seller should have an information advantage. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged in the giving of good advice and information" (reported by Muslim). These principles accord with the standards espoused by fair trade advocates. The Qur'an disapproves of fraud and cheating in whatever from they might be. This includes concealing the defects of and adulteration in merchandise, diminution in weights and measures. Again, Hoarding of grain to cause shortage and, therefore, to increase prices. This is general injury and injustice. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that if somebody hoarded grain for forty days and then gave it away in the name of God. This act of giving away will not expiate for his sin of hoarding. Thus prohibition of hoarding grain is absolute but considerations must also be given to the time and kind of crop(s) hoarded. When there is scarcity together with demand for food grains, hoarding causes injury and *haram* to general public. Exploitation of any person is not

allowed in Islam and everyone should receive justified compensation irrespective of class and gender. The Qur'an says:

"Give just measure, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due" (7:85).

4.8. Decent wages and Dignity of workers in Islam

Fair trade advocates decent wages and working conditions for workers, as well as long-term trading contracts to provide greater security and a safe and healthy working environment for producers and workers. Producers can request pre-harvest finance or credit and receive the additional fair trade premium to fund social development projects such as primary schools and health care. There is considerable support in Islamic teachings for fair trade principles on the fair treatment of workers and contract with the employees. The Qur'an states:

"O you who believe, fulfil your contracts" (5:1).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) asserted, "Muslims must abide by their agreements, unless there is an agreement that makes *halal* (permitted) what is *haram* (prohibited) or makes *haram* what is *halal*" (reported by Tirmidhi).

This means that illegal terms and conditions are not valid under Islamic law. The dignity of workers must also be respected. Importantly, no work should be considered menial or degrading. Workers should be treated with dignity and honour and have a humane and safe environment for work. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Your brothers have your responsibility. Allah has made them under your hands. So whosoever has a brother under his hand, let him give food as he eats and dress as he dresses. Do not give them work that will overburden them and if you do give them such task then provide them with assistance" (reported by Bukhari). Finally, workers should be given adequate, timely and fair wages. In fact, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) considered denying a worker his or her full wage to be an immoral act and said he would personally plead against "he who has received work from a labourer and did not pay him in full" (reported by Bukhari). In common with fair trade practices, Islam advocates that workers be paid promptly and always on time. Indeed the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Give to the worker his wages before his sweat dries" (reported by Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah). Based on all the above principles, we can also infer in Islam that workers have a right to exercise freedom of association and the right to form unions in order to establish and safeguard their rights and gain the bargaining power to receive just compensation.

5. Conclusion

Fair trade plays an important role in the lives of many low-income producers and workers in poor countries through exercising and executing its principles. Because of the justification of fair trade its appeal is growing over time throughout the world. There is increasing evidence of the economic and development benefits of fair trade for marginalized producers in poor countries. The discussion in the paper highlights, the principles of Islam are not silent on issues of fair trade and trade justice. Indeed, there is a rich heritage in Islam of high moral standards, ethics, values and norms of behavior, which govern personal, professional and business life. In the area of business and commerce Islam obliges buyers, sellers and consumers to act honestly, fairly and with integrity in their daily business practices which is not something that can be treated separately from all other aspects of social life. Islam also obliges workers to be treated fairly, and with dignity and respect. Since the fair trade movement is primarily concerned with fairness, equity and justice, it seems that the principles of fair trade and the teachings of Islam are entirely congruent. With references from the Qur'an and hadiths this analysis demonstrates that, from an Islamic perspective, there are indeed strong and clear faith-based reasons for supporting fair trade initiatives. Through supporting fair trade, Muslims can ensure that producers receive a fair price that guarantees a living income and decent working conditions with longer-term contracts that provide greater security and ensure more sustainable development. Indeed in many respects, Islamic thinking goes much further than contemporary fair trade advocacy efforts, as Islam forbids speculation and the hoarding of merchandise in order to increase prices, it prohibits interest as a mechanism of exploitation that reinforces poverty, and prohibits trade in goods that compromises the hearts and minds of consumers.

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