

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَجْلَدُ رِبَا وَفِيهِ مَقَالَةٌ لِمَوْلَانَا

RIBĀ AND INTEREST*

FAZLUR RAHMAN

Note : Ribā is usually translated in Urdu by the word *sūd*, which is of Persian origin and literally means 'profit', its antonym being *ziyān*. *Sūd* is not synonymous with the Qur'anic term *ribā*, but is synonymous with the Arabic word *ribh*. In fact, any attempt to translate the Qur'anic term, 'ribā' in any language, is not only futile, but is also the source of much confused thinking on the subject.—(F. R.)

INTRODUCTION

The literal meaning of *ribā* (ر، ب، و)، as illustrated by the Qur'anic usage, is :

(i) to grow, e.g.

وترى الارض هامدة فاذا انزلنا عليها الماء اهتزت وربت
(الحج : ٥)

"And thou beholdest the earth barren, then when We send down water upon it, it quickens and grows...." (XXII : 5);

(ii) to increase ; to prosper;

يمحق الله الربوا ويربي الصدقات (البقرة : ٢٤٦)

"God destroys *ribā*, but makes alms prosper" (II : 276) ;

وما آتيتم من ربا ليربوا في اموال الناس فلا يربوا عند الله
(الروم : ٣٩)

"And whatever you invest in *ribā* so that it may increase upon the people's wealth, it increases not with God ;" (XXX : 39);

(iii) to rise (for example of a hill), as

واوتيناها بربوة (المؤمنون : ٥)

"And We gave them refuge upon a height..." (XXIII : 50);

*This is the translation by Mazheruddin Siddiqi of an Urdu article by the author entitled *Tahqiq-i Ribā*, which was published in the monthly Urdu journal of this Institute, *Fikr-o Nazar*, i/5 (November, 1963).—(Ed.)

كمثل جنة يربو (البخرة : ٢٦٥)

"As the likeness of a garden upon a hill..."
(II : 265);

(iv) to swell (for example, foam), as

فاحتل السيل زيداً رايياً (الرعد : ١٤)

"Then the torrent carried a swelling scum;"
(XIII : 17);

(v) to nurture; to raise (a child); as

ارحمهما كما ريانى صغيراً (نبي اسرائيل : ٢٣)

"My Lord, have mercy upon them (i.e. my parents)
as they raised me up when I was little!" (XVII : 24);

الم نربك فينا وليداً (الشعراء : ١٨)

"Did we not raise thee amongst us as a child?"
(XXVI : 18);

(vi) augmentation, increase in power, etc., as

فاخذهم اخذة رايية (الحاقة : ١٠)

"He seized them with a surpassing grip..."
(LXIX : 10);

ان تكون امة هي اربي من امة (النحل : ٩٢)

"That one nation be more powerful than another
nation...." (XVI : 92).

From the lexical meaning given above, the technical meaning of the term 'ribā' is derived as discussed below.

We shall first take up the nature of ribā prohibited by the Qur'ān. In the second section we shall turn to the legal *Hadith*-materials concerning the extension of the Qur'ānic term ribā to different forms of exchange and transactions. This is justified on the ground that all the *fuqahā'* are agreed that these two fall into distinct categories: indeed, the one has been called "*ribā al-Qur'ān* (*ribā* of the Qur'ān)" and the other "*ribā al-Ḥadīth* (*ribā* of the *Ḥadīth*)" or "*ribā al-faḍl* (*ribā* of excess)". In the third section we shall underline the role of bank-interest in the present-day economy, and in the last section we shall record our conclusions based on these considerations and materials.

I

RIBĀ AND THE QUR'ĀN

The first statement of the Qur'ān about ribā is as follows:

وما آتيتم من رباً ليربوا في اموال الناس فلا يربوا عند الله و ما
آتيتم من زكوة تريدون وجه الله فاولئك هم المضعفون (الروم : ٣٩)

"And whatever you invest by way of ribā so that it may increase upon people's wealth, increases not with God; but what you give by way of zakāh seeking the pleasure of God, those—they receive recompense manifold" (XXX : 39).

This was revealed in Mecca for it occurs in the *Sūrah al-Rūm*, which is wholly a Meccan revelation. The inner evidence of the opening verses of this *Sūrah* indicates that it was revealed during the fourth or fifth year of the Prophet's Mission, or even earlier, for the Persians began defeating the Romans in "the neighbouring lands" (ادنى الارض), i.e. Syria and Palestine, referred to in these verses, in 611 A.C. (i.e. the first year of the Prophet's Mission) and with the fall of Constantinople in 614 A.C. reached its culmination (i.e. year 4 of the Prophet's Mission).² It is not at all surprising that ribā is condemned in so early a revelation; rather the absence of such early condemnation could have not only been surprising but also contrary to the wisdom of the Qur'ān. The Meccan verses of the Qur'ān are replete with the denunciation of the economic injustice of contemporary Meccan society, the profiteering and stinginess of the rich, and their unethical commercial practices such as cheating in the weight and measurements, etc., how is it possible then that the Qur'ān would have failed to condemn an economic evil such as ribā? However, here it passes only a moral stricture on ribā; it does not yet declare it legally prohibited for Islam had not yet attained political power by which it could eradicate this evil.

When Islam became politically dominant after the Prophet's migration to Medina, ribā was categorically prohibited in the following words of the Medinese *Sūrah Āl-Imrān*:

يا ايها الذين آمنوا لا تأكلوا الربوا اضعافا مضاعفة و اتقوا الله

لعلمكم تفاحون (آل عمران : ١٣٠)

"O you who believe, do not consume ribā with continued redoubling and protect yourselves from God, perchance you may be blissful" (III : 130).