THE ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC STATE.  

Price: Not Mentioned

This book is based on the author’s doctoral thesis entitled “Economic Functions of the Islamic State to the end of the Umayyad Period” which he submitted to the Edinburgh University in 1973 for his Ph.D. degree. The book has been divided into three parts. Part first contains four chapters and deals with basic principles such as ‘economic teachings of the Qur’an, economic teachings of the Hadith, the foundations of the economic life’ and ‘ownership and controls’. The second part consists of nine chapters and treats the institution of Bayt al-Mal (the exchequer) in the light of different issues such as ‘the concept and the early history of Bayt al-Mal, Ghanimah and Khums (booty and fifth), Zakāt (the poor due), Jizyah and Kharāj (poll-tax and land-tax), ‘ushūr, debts, donations; centre-province relationship; expenditures of the Islamic State and its economic policy, and ‘a note on coinage’. Part third comprises one chapter and offers views on ‘price and cost of living, salaries and wages, affluence and standard of living, and ‘population’. There are two appendices, a preface and a list of abbreviations in the beginning and a bibliography and an index at the end of the book.

The Islamic Jurists and the Muslim as well as the non-Muslim economists have done yeoman service to this important subject and there are standard works available for understanding, developing and reorganizing this branch of Islamic economics. For instance in Arabic there are Abu Yusuf’s Kitāb al-Kharāj (Taxation in Islam), Abū ‘Ubayd’s Kitāb al-Amwāl (Treatise on Wealth) Al-Mawardi’s al-Ābkām al-Sulṭāniyyah (Principles of Governing), Dr. Badawi’s al-Nizām al-Māli al-Islāmi al-Muqārin (A Comparative Study of the Islamic Fiscal system) etc; in English S.A. Siddiqi’s Public Finance in Islam, Aghnides’s Mohammadan Theories of Finance etc., and in Urdu there are Dr. Nejatullah Siddiqi’s Islam Kā naẓariyya-e-Milikiyyat (Islamic Theory of ownership), Hifzur Rahman’s Islam Kā Iqtisādi Niẓām (Economic system of Islam), Dr. Yusuf-uddin’s Islām Ke Ma’aṣrī Naẓariyye (Economic Doctrines of Islam) etc. However, there is always a need to rearrange the rich material incorporated in old fashioned books into the new ones. Secondly, English literature on Islamic economics is still inadequate, invariably apologetic in nature and contentious in tone (with a few exceptions) and requires enrichment. Dr. Hasanuzzaman has tried to meet both these requirements in
this valuable work. In the first part the author has collected references to the verses of the holy Qur'an and the traditions of the holy Prophet that relate to the economic functions of the Islamic state. In most cases, this part describes, but does not analyse the implications of these verses and traditions on some issues such as the concept of ownership, the concept of equity, lawful and unlawful distribution, agriculture, trade, hoarding, interest, labour etc. In my view in this part the author's views, though correct, require further elaborations.

In the second part, the focal part of the book the author has very ably outlined the historical survey of the institution of Bayt al-M'al, its sources and expenditures. Under the caption of Jizyab and Kharaj the author has collected and arranged very rich and authentic material for economists and research scholars.

In part three, the author has discussed some key economic terms such as the level of prices, fixation of wages and salaries, and standard of living to show how the economic system of that early Islamic era functioned and how the Arabian milieu changed from simple standard of living to a higher one. The author maintains that in that era wealth was equitably distributed, taxes were evenly levied and the level of prices was kept within the reach of the common man, the wages and salaries were justly fixed, and the resultant standard of living of a man of moderate means was good.

Throughout the book one finds that the views or comments of the author are in consonance with Shari'ah. For elucidating the rate of taxes, amount of revenue from different provinces during different regimes of the early Islamic state and many other issues of a numerical nature the author has given maps, charts and diagrams. He has tried to furnish complete and authentic data. However, in a few cases he had to draw inadequate conclusions due to the non-availability of complete data. The learned author has succeeded in collecting and arranging standard material on the economic history of the fiscal system of the Islamic society to the end of the Ummayad period. One however feels very strongly that he has not even slightly touched the question as to how that system can help us in solving the fiscal problems of our present day life, a problem which is far more important.

Though, an errata has been appended at the end yet the frequency of errors remains a great deficiency for such a valuable work. Another deficiency of the work, according to me, is that often chapters do not follow each other logically. For instance the first part of the book carries four chapters i.e. 'Economic teachings of the Qur'an, Economic teachings of the Hadith', 'The moral foundations of the economic life' and 'ownership and controls' Though, a link among the first three chapters may be established but chapter fourth, perhaps, has no justification here. In my opinion all these four chapters could be merged under a main heading "Fundamentals of Islamic economics" or so.

Another example of this gap is found between the chapters twelve and thirteen. However, the author might have mentioned these two chapters under a main heading.
* "Miscellaneous functions of Islamic state". Yet another striking example of mis-appropriation of title is the caption of chapter thirteen i.e. 'a note on coinage'. The learned author could entitle it "Issuing currency" instead, to link it logically with the other chapters of the second part.

The method of references is very often inconvenient to the reader. The author does not give full documentation regarding name of publisher, place and date of publication etc.

The methodology of research is historical. Despite my strong reservations about the analytical contents of the book it is a welcome monograph on the economic system of the early Islamic society. The author, in preparing this work has relied on the authentic sources of Islamic jurisprudence, history, administration and economics. The language is simple, the style lucid and the get-up beautiful. The author deserves commendation for producing such a valuable book.

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