Shirā', an Unfair Barter Exchange in the Holy Qur'an: A Linguistic Study

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Abstract

Shirā' is one of the most important economic exchanges in Arabian Peninsula at the age of revelation of the Holy Qur'an. Taking critical approach towards the idea of synonymy between Shirā' and other economic exchanges like Bayʿ and Tijāra, this essay identifies its unique entity and functions. According to evidences, Shirā' denotes the direct exchange of goods for each other without the medium of money. Moreover, linguistic evidences indicate two origins for the term "Shirā'" merged with each other throughout a linguistic contact. Therefore, "Shirā'" signifies a special type of barter exchange which is described by economic anthropologists as "zero-sum game barter". These results have been strengthened by (a) anthropological data on barters, (b) environmental data on Arabian Peninsula, and (c) Qur'anic usages of this term. Eventually, the reason for metaphorical usages of this term in the Holy Qur'an is also examined.

Keywords: Shirā', Barter, Economic Exchanges, Selling and Buying, Economic Anthropology, Quran and Linguistics.

1. Introduction

The "economic life", the tripartite sequence of activities through which people produce, exchange and consume goods, plays a vital role in continuation of societies[1]. Although each of these phases is indispensable to economic life, the second phase, exchange of goods, has attracted the attention of a bunch of researchers due to its mediating role between two other ones. In addition, the Qur'an's attention to this aspect of Arabs' economic life is more than others, manifested in dealing with various economic exchanges extensively like *zakāt, ṣadaqa, infāq, Bayʿ, Tijāra, ribā* and so on[2].

Moreover, *Shirā'* as one of the most significant and pervasive economic exchange had its own unique entity and functions in economic context of Arabian Peninsula, especially prior to appearance of South-North commercial corridor in *Ḥijāz*. Concentrating on this concept which is used 25 times in the Qur'an[3], this essay for the first time discusses hidden aspects of it in terms of "Barter" to recognize its semantic components. This study will first take a glance at findings of Muslim lexicographers about this word. Their opinion on synonymy between *Shirā'* and other economic exchanges like *Bayʿ* and *Tijāra* led to ignorance of both unique semantic components of *Shirā'* , and its status in economic context of Arabian Peninsula. That's why this study will identify the meaning of this word more precisely with its cognates in other Semitic

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[1] Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 168; Carrier, 'Introduction', p. 3.
[2] For a brief study regarding the economic exchanges in the Qur'an, see: Rippin, 'Trade & Commerce', pp. 311-316.

[3] See: ʿAbd al-bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-Mufahras*, p. 381.

languages. It will then discuss the economic rationality of *Shirā'* in terms of "Barter", and ultimately analyze its usages in the Holy Qur'an.

To achieve above goals, this study will apply couple of methods, "etymology" and "economic anthropology". Etymology is the study of the origin, basic meaning, and development of individual words as well as of their relationship to words in different languages of the same origin[4]. Economic anthropology is the cross-cultural study of economic life, systems of production, distribution, and consumption[5].

2. *Shirā'* from the Viewpoint of Muslim Lexicographers

Muslim lexicographers have expressed two points of view on the root "*sh-r-y*". Studying its various derivatives, a large number of lexicographers affirm that this root signifies two opposite meanings, both "selling" and "buying", simultaneously[6]. Justifying this point, they mention that both price (*thaman*) and commodities (*muthman*) which are transferred in all economic exchanges can be considered as something given, and therefore something sold. On the other hand, they can be also regarded as something obtained, and therefore something bought[7]. Few lexicographers, however, make a sharp contrast between *Shirā'* and *Bayʿ* through which the former means simply "buying", and the latter means "selling"[8].

Misunderstandings resulted from obscurity of the root "*sh-r-y*" have caused problems for identifying sense relation[9] between two infinitives *Shirā'* and *Ishtirā'*. Although most of Muslim lexicographers believe in synonymy, others draw a distinction between "*Shirā'*" signifying "selling", and "*Ishtirā'*" signifying "buying"[10].

It is worth mentioning that the meaning of the root "*sh-r-y*" can be better understood by putting aside prevalently money-oriented economic discourses in which the price of goods and services is estimated by monetary cost. Money as a constant, fixed side of economic exchanges distinguishes "selling" from "buying" based upon its direction. Accordingly, someone spending money and obtaining goods is called "buyer". By contrast, someone gaining money and giving goods is called "seller"[11]. However, to make a difference between "buying" and "selling" in some types of economic exchanges like barter (the direct exchange of goods for each other without the medium of money) is nonsense. Therefore, giving and obtaining something simultaneously, barter partners can be considered as both "seller" and "buyer". Because Muslim lexicographers were ignorant about the form and reason of this kind of economic exchange, they either generalized the meaning of *Shirā'* to both "selling" and "buying", or specialized it to simply "buying". However, drawing a distinction between "selling" and "buying" in the concept *Shirā'* as barter exchange is basically unacceptable.

3. Etymological Study of *Shirā'*

Now is the time to focus on studying the origin and history of the root "*sh-r-y*" in order to recognize its semantic components, and therefore, its unique

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[4] Bussmann, *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, p. 385; Campbell & Mixco, *A Glossary of Historical Linguistics*, pp. 56-57.

[5] Ferraro & Andreatta, *Cultural Anthropology*, pp. 13-14, 177-178; for further information, see: Herskovits, *Economic Anthropology*, passim.

[6] Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāʾīs al-Lugha*, vol. 3, p. 266; Jawharī, *Tāj al- Lugha*, vol. 6, p. 2391; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 14, p. 428.

[7] Fayyūmī, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, vol. 1, p. 312.

[8] Rāghib Isfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, p. 453; Muṣṭafawī, *al-Taḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qur'an*, vol. 6, p. 52.

[9] For studies regarding the problem of meaning from the viewpoint of sense relations, see: Palmer, *Semantics*, chapter 4.

[10] Khalīl bin Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, vol. 6, p. 282; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 14, p. 428.

[11] Kottak, *Cultural anthropology*, p. 174; Hunt, 'One-Way Economic Tranfers', p. 290.

characteristics by which it differs from other economic exchanges like *Bayʿ* and *Tijāra*. The point to bear in mind is that this root and its derivatives signify a type of economic exchange only in Arabic among various Semitic languages[12]. Moreover, the linguistic evidences show that this root, as will be discussed, came from two different origins.

A) Taking etymological evidence into consideration, "sh-r-y" as a stem originates from the reconstructed lexicon "ĉar" meaning "to buy and to sell" in the proto Hamito- Semitic language. Relying on its surviving lexicon in language branches of Semitic and West Chadic, Orel and Stolbova have reconstructed this word. It gave the meaning of "to buy and to sell" in the former language, and that of "to buy in order to sell" in the latter[13]. The simultaneous denotation of "to sell" and "to buy" by this word refers to the fact that barter transactions were the most prevalent economic ones among primitive peoples. Hence, buying a commodity from another one was not possible but through selling one's own commodity to him. Therefore, the parties to these transactions practically played the simultaneous role of the buyer and the seller.

B) According to etymological studies, there is another root "*sh-r-y*" (شرى) in Semitic languages which is homonymous to the previous one. The Hebrew word שָׂרָה (*Shārāh*) came from this root signifies "to persist / to persevere / to be angered", and then "to fight / to contend"[14]. Indeed, this is the origin of the popular personal noun יִשְׂרָאֵל (*Israel*, اسـرائيل) in Hebrew culture[15].

According to Jewish theology, Jacob has been called "*Israel*" since he wrestled with God and prevailed against him[16].

The Semitists believe that the Hebrew root שָׂרָה (*Shārāh*) has no cognate in Semitic languages except Arabic[17]. The usages of the Arabic root "*sh-r-y*" witness to accuracy of Semitists' point of view. For example, the Arabic clause "*Sharīya al-Rajul*" (شَـرِيَ الرجـلُ) signifies the anger of a person[18]. In addition, the clauses "*Sharā bi Nafsihī ʿan Qawmihī*" (شَـرَى بنفسِـه عـن قومِـه) and "*Ashrā al-Qawm*" (أشـرَى القـوم) mean "someone fights instead of his tribe" and "someone raises hostility among people" respectively[19]. Furthermore, the clauses "*Istashrā Fulānun*" (استَشـرَى فـلانٌ) and "*Shārāhu Shirā'an*" (شـاراهُ شِـراءً) indicate "someone persists in doing something"[20] and "a couple of persons persist with each other"[21]. A Hadith attributed to ʿAyisha describes her father as a man who exerts himself in religious affairs (*Istashrā fī Dīnihī*, استَشـرَى فـى دينِـه)[22]. The Arabic infinitives "*Istishrā*" (استشـراء) and "*Mushārāt*" (مُشـاراة) also mean "to be angry" and "to persist"[23]. Finally, the word "*Sharyān / Shiryān*" (شَريان / شِـريان) signifies "a special tree by which bows can be

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[12] Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qurʾanic Arabic*, p. 238.

[13] Orel & Stolbova, *Hamito- Semitic Etymological Dictionary*, p. 127.

[14] Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 975; Mashkūr, *Farhang Taṭbīqī ʿArabī*, vol. 1, pp. 442-443.

[15] "Israel" means literally "he contended with God", from שָׂרָה (= he fought, contended), and אֵל (= God) (Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*, pp. 266, 681).

[16] See: Old Testament, Genesis, 32: 24-29, and also Hosea, 12: 2-4.

[17] For further information about the semantic extensions of the root "*sh-r-y*" in other Semitic languages, see: Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez*, p. 536; Beeston, *Sabaic Dictionary*, p. 135; Drower & Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, pp. 457, 463.

[18] Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāʾīs al-Lugha*, vol. 3, p. 266; Ibn Sīda, *al-Mukhaṣṣaṣ*, vol. 4, p. 79.

[19] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 14, p. 429.

[20] Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-Lugha,* vol. 11, p. 275; Ṭurayḥī, *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn*, vol. 1, p. 245.

[21] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 14, p. 429.

[22] Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-Kabīr*, vol. 23, p. 184; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, vol. 30, p. 388.

[23] Khalīl bin Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, vol. 6, p. 282; Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-Lugha,* vol. 11, p. 275.

made"[24].

As mentioned above, according to various derivatives of the root "*sh-r-y*" (شرى) in Arabic, there are two original meanings which at the outset have no direct connection with each other:

A) "*sh-r-y*" which means "selling" and "buying" simultaneously indicates a kind of economic exchange, barter. The point to bear in mind is that this root is only found in Arabic among various Semitic languages.

B) "*sh-r-y*" which means "to persist / to be angered" indicates a kind of mental state against the other as an opponent. This Arabic root has no cognate in Semitic languages except Hebrew root שָׂרָה (*Shārāh*) which contributes to forming יִשְׂרָאֵל (*Israel*).

Accordingly, both the absence of sense relation between these two roots and their distinct cognates in other Semitic languages demonstrate two different origins for the Arabic root "*sh-r-y*", the first of which will be recognized hereafter as "*sh-r-y*"(1) and the second as "*sh-r-y*"(2). Each of these two roots, thus, has its own origin and history, and they are, therefore, homonymous instead of being polysemous.

Despite the absence of etymological relation between these two forms of "*sh-r-y*", it is time to discuss the possibility of folk etymology[25] which associates between them and leads to adding a new semantic component to "*sh-r-y*"(1). Therefore, a special kind of barter exchange may be formed in Arabian Peninsula which differs from previous one. For this main issue to be addressed, the entity and functions of "barter exchange" must be studied precisely. Fortunately, economic anthropologists have collected extensive information on this kind of economic

exchange from all around the world which paves the way for further study of "*Shirā'*".

4. Barter Exchange and its Economic Logic

One of the most significant and prevalent economic exchanges among primitive communities is barter exchange. The most central element of this transaction is direct exchange of goods without the medium of money[26]. Trading partners, therefore, meet their own needs only throughout transfer of goods or services between themselves. That's why the prime focus of interest for the barter partners is in the commodities and services themselves. The only reason, thus, leading the partners to barter exchange is the need of one partners for something that only the other can provide[27].

Needless to say, to grasp the economic logic of barter exchange, an accurate notion of "cost" is essential. Since the commodities were not estimated by "monetary cost" among primitive communities rooted in the lack of money among them, these communities were in urgent need of another valid criterion to exchange goods. That's why the commodities were estimated by "opportunity cost" instead of monetary one.

The "opportunity cost" is appraised at the amount of time and effort required to produce a commodity. For example, a person spending an amount of his time and effort to produce something could save it for producing something else or even more time available for resting. Accordingly, barter partners exchange their own products based upon opportunity cost of each one[28]. A and B, thus, owning fish and fruit respectively exchange one fish for three fruit. This price, one fish for three fruit neither two fish for three fruit nor one fish for five fruit, is estimated by

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[24] Ibn Durayd, *al-Ishtiqāq*, p. 503; Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-Lugha,* vol. 11, p. 275; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, vol. 14, p. 431.

[25] For studies regarding the folk etymology, see: Campbell, *Historical Linguistics*, pp. 100-101.

[26] Hart, 'Money', p. 162.

[27] Heady, 'Barter', p. 262.

[28] Ibid, p. 263.

opportunity cost of each one.

Moreover, anthropological studies conducted around the process of bartering in various communities demonstrate a dichotomy between two types of barter transaction as will be explained:

1) According to some anthropological accounts, each of barter partners bargains with the other to get a sweet deal for his/her own at the other's expense. They enter into haggling negotiations in order to give less goods in terms of quality and quantity, and to obtain more. Each of them makes an effort to diminish the value of his/her partner's commodity, and therefore reduce its opportunity cost. In contrast, they persist in great deal of time and effort producing their own commodity, and therefore increase its opportunity cost. These bilateral negotiations continue to achieve a final accepted result. That's why the ultimate approval of generally accepted prices is constantly met with boring discussions, and even with rude ones. This adversarial bargaining leads to a negative economic transaction between barter partners in which an increased benefit for one partner represents a decrease in the benefit to the other. This type of barter transaction in which the partners do not seek a win-win agreement is called "zero-sum game barter"[29].

2) According to some accounts, however, the transacting partners avoid all bargaining, and exchange without argument at generally accepted prices. Thus, the courtesy in this type of trading is not less than "gift exchange"[30]. Each of the partners of this kind of bartering who seeks a win-win exchange appreciates the efforts of the other in pursuit of his commodities, and thus does not reduce his opportunity cost. That's why the transacted

commodities are equivalent in value, and therefore a sense of moral commitment between trading partners leads to a satisfactory outcome to both sides. This type of barter transaction in which the partners seek a win-win agreement is called "gift-like barter"[31].

According to anthropological reports, the first type of barter exchange is done between partners coming from different and potentially antagonistic ethnic groups. The second type, however, is done between those who are from the identical tribe, or are ritual friends. When barter partners do not have any social relationship with each other, both of them only make an effort to meet their own needs selfishly. Given the circumstances, not only bargaining and persisting but also discourtesy and even hostility are entirely expected. However, when partners, besides meeting their own needs, seek to create, maintain and strengthen social bonds, they barter in a friendly and courteous manner. Bartering with both tribesmen and ritual friends leads to continuation of ties of kinship and unbreakable economic-political bonds respectively. Indeed, partners give priority to long-term strategic relationships rather than short-term temporary benefits[32].

So far, the entity, functions, economic logic and two types of barter exchange have been discussed. Now is the time to describe and analyze the barter process in Arabian Peninsula, and thus identify "*Shirā'*" as either "zero-sum game barter" or "gift-like barter".

5. *Shirā'* and Unfairness in Barter Exchange

Evidences reveal considerable unfairness in the process of "*Shirā'*" which leads constantly down a zero-sum game barter, and therefore making huge profit for one side at the other's expense.

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[29] Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, p. 195; Hart, 'Money', p. 162.

[30] For studies regarding the gift exchange, see: Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 10-23; Strathern & Stewart, 'Ceremonial Exchange', pp. 230-245; Yan, 'The Gift & Gift Economy', pp. 246-261.

[31] Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 277-314.
[32] Heady, 'Barter', pp. 268-269.

One of the most significant evidences testifying to unfairness in "*Shirā'*" is that the Arabic root "*sh-r-y*" indicates (1) "to sell / to buy" and (2) "to persist / to be angered" simultaneously. It is worth mentioning that despite the absence of etymological relation between these two forms of "*sh-r-y*" rooted in their different origin and history, Arabic language users neglected the homonymy between them, and therefore merged one meaning with the other. This linguistic merger, called "linguistic contact"[33], led to a contact between "*sh-r-y*"(1) and "*sh-r-y*"(2) by which "*sh-r-y*"(3) as a new compound meaning was generated. "*Shirā'*", thus, signifies a type of barter transaction in which partners engage themselves in adversarial haggling in pursuit of their own benefits selfishly. The undoubted consequence of this conflict is inequality between the values of transacted commodities.

In addition to linguistic evidences, the study of geography and environment of Arabian Peninsula also points out unfairness in the process of "*Shirā'*". The environment of this region caused serious problems for production activities. Indeed, warm, dry and non-cultivable land, long-term droughts and famines, and also strong sandstorms all caused destruction of pastures, loss of livestock and stagnancy of agriculture[34]. Given the circumstances, agricultural and pastoral modes of production took lots of time and effort for Arabs, and thus increased the opportunity cost of their products. That's why the process of bartering (*Shirā'*) in Arabian Peninsula was always accompanied by adversarial haggling and hard bargaining

by which unequal goods were transacted[35]. What improved economic conditions of Arabian Peninsula was establishment of "*Tijāra*" about 50 years prior to appearance of Islam by which *Ḥijāz* played a central role as a South-North corridor for transferring goods from Yemen to Syria[36].

Moreover, the study of Qur'anic verses containing derivatives of the root "*sh-r-y*" also demonstrates unfairness in the process of "*Shirā'*". This important point will be discussed in detail in the following section.

6. *Shirā'* in the Holy Qur'an

The usages of the root "*sh-r-y*" in Qur'anic verses demonstrate that "*Shirā'*" is the direct exchange of goods for each other without the medium of money. The Holy Qur'an speaks of exchanging error for guidance (Q. 2:16 & 175), torment for forgiveness (Q. 2:175), disbelief for faith (Q. 3:177), worldly life for hereafter (Q. 2:86; Q. 4:74), believers' lives and properties for Paradise (Q. 9:111) in terms of barter exchange. Covenants (Q. 3:77; Q. 16:95), oaths (Q. 3:77), testimonies (Q. 5:106), God's signs / revelations (Q. 2:41; Q. 3:199; Q. 5:44; Q. 9:9) and God's scriptures (Q. 2:79; Q. 2:174; Q. 3:187) all are considered as commodities exchanged for cheap gain (*Thaman Qalīl*) in the Qur'an. All preceding examples obviously indicate high frequency of metaphorical usages of the root "*sh-r-y*" in the Qur'an by which religious teachings are conveyed[37]. This reality undoubtedly is rooted in familiarity of Qur'an's first audience with this special economic exchange[38].

Studies conducted around "Metaphors" from the 60s onwards suggest viewing metaphors as cognitive events rather than solely poetic imagination and rhetorical

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[33] For studies regarding the linguistic contact, see: Palmer, *Semantics*, pp. 67-69; Campbell, *Historical Linguistics*, pp. 100, 270.
[34] al-ʿUlā, *Tārīkh al-ʿArab al-Qadīm*, pp. 130-131; Bayyūmī, *Dirāsāt fī Tārīkh al-ʿArab al-Qadīm,* pp. 120-123; Birrū, *Tārīkh al-ʿArab al-Qadīm*, pp. 33-34.

[35] For studies regarding the influence of the environment of Arabian Peninsula on Arabs' economic life, see: Jawād ʿAlī, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-ʿArab*, vol. 7, chapter 88.
[36] For further information, see: Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca*, pp. 38-40.
[37] Buckley, 'Markets', p. 276.
[38] See: Jawād ʿAlī, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-ʿArab*, vol. 7, p. 229; Birrū, *Tārīkh al-ʿArab al-Qadīm*, p. 242.

flourish. Metaphor, from this viewpoint, is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another[39]. Accordingly, the Holy Qur'an, for instance, speaks about "embracing disbelief after accepting faith" (Q. 3:177) in terms of "barter exchange" (*Shirāʾ*) in order to clarify this happening better. An apostate, therefore, looks like a barter partner who exchanges his commodity (faith) for Satan's one (disbelief).

Although the root "*sh-r-y*" is very often used metaphorically in Qur'anic verses, it is used literally only in Q. 12:20-21 which speaks about selling Joseph to an Egyptian man. This Qur'anic usage bears a couple of important points:

1) Contrary to linguistic and anthropological evidences which witness to absence of money in the process of "*Shirāʾ*", the Qur'an speaks of exchanging Joseph for money (silver coins / dirhams): "*wa sharawhu bi thamanin bakhsin Darāhima maʿdūdatin*" (وَشَرَوْهُ بِـثَمَنٍ بَخـسٍ

دَرَاهِـمَ مَعـدُودَة) (Q. 12:20). In other words, this verse which at the outset speaks about exchanging Joseph for cheap gain (*Thaman Bakhs*) explains in detail exchanging him for a few silver coins (*Darāhim maʿdūda*). "*Thaman*", according to Muslim lexicographers' point of view, is something given in order to obtain something else[40]. Therefore, both commodities transacted in barter exchange can be considered as "*Thaman*". That's why drawing a distinction between "*Thaman*" and "*Muthman*", and also between "selling" and "buying" in barter transactions is nonsense. Accordingly, since money was not prevalent in economic context of Arabian Peninsula, the Holy Qur'an

illustrated cheap gain (*Thaman Bakhs*) with an adjective compound, a few silver coins (*Darāhim maʿdūda*), in order to make clear that what was given for Joseph was an amount of "money" rather than a commodity.

2) Although the first audience of these verses was from *Ḥijāz*, these verses speak about events which happened in ancient Egypt ruled by a central government minting coins. The use of the root "*sh-r-y*", thus, to indicate exchanging Joseph for few coins is only rooted in limitation of Arabic language at the time of revelation of the Qur'an. Moreover, although the appearance of trading (*Tijāra*) in Arabian Peninsula with its neighbors had caused import of their money in the region, Arabs considered that money as commodities. Therefore, exchanging Joseph for few coins must be understood in terms of barter exchange[41].

All literal and metaphorical usages of the root "*sh-r-y*" in the Holy Qur'an point out that "*Shirāʾ*" is an unfair barter exchange in which the value of transacted commodities is unequal. The only literal use of this root in Q. 12:20-21 which speaks of bartering Joseph for a few silver coins obviously demonstrates inequality of transacted things. Moreover, metaphorical uses of this root in Qur'anic verses which speak about bartering error for guidance, disbelief for faith, worldly life for hereafter, believers' lives and properties for Paradise etc. all plainly demonstrate inequality of transacted things. Accordingly, the Qur'anic metaphor "exchanging faith for disbelief" (Q. 3:177) clarifies that an apostate looks like a barter partner who exchanges his most valuable commodity (faith) for Satan's worthless one (disbelief). The first audience of this Qur'anic verse, indeed, who is all-too-familiar with the process of "*Shirāʾ*", and gains memorable bittersweet experiences

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[39] For studies regarding the cognitive approach towards metaphors, see: Lakoff & Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By,* pp. 5, 7; Croft & Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics*, chapter 8; Evans & Green, *Cognitive Linguistics*, chapter 9; Grady, 'Metaphor', pp. 188-213.

[40] Rāghib Isfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, p. 177; Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāʾīs al-Lugha*, vol. 1, p. 386; Fayyūmī, *al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, vol. 1, p. 84.

[41] For studies regarding the barter origins of money, see: Hart, 'Money', pp. 161-163.

in it, can easily believe in its terrible results. Furthermore, according to Q. 9:111, Allah promises believers that he shall barter (*Ishtarā*) Paradise for their lives and properties. Although the value of believers' lives and properties is not equal to paradise, God due to his grace and generosity is going to exchange blissful Paradise for theirs.

7. Conclusion

Along with "production" and "consumption", the "distribution" of goods and services which plays an important role in tripartite sequence of economic activities is realized in different types of "economic exchanges". Since the Holy Qur'an pays special attention to this aspect of Arabs' economic life, it is absolutely necessary to recognize characteristics and functions of each of economic exchanges in Arabian Peninsula.

Accordingly, "*Shirā'*" as one of the most significant economic exchanges in the region was examined in this paper. Linguistic evidences point out that "*Shirā'*" is barter exchange by which commodities are transacted with each other without the medium of money. Therefore, making a distinction between "buying" and "selling" in this type of economic exchange is nonsense. That's why the root "*sh-r-y*" signifies both "selling" and "buying" simultaneously.

Moreover, the study of history of the root "*sh-r-y*" indicates two origins for it merged with each other throughout a linguistic contact. Indeed, "*sh-r-y*"(1) which means "to sell" and "to buy" had no etymological relation with "*sh-r-y*"(2) which means "to persist" and "to be angered". Despite the absence of etymological relation between these two forms of "*sh-r-y*", Arabic language users neglected the homonymy between them, and therefore merged those two meanings with each other. "*sh-r-y*"(3), thus, as a new compound meaning signifies a type of barter transaction in which partners engage

themselves in adversarial haggling in pursuit of their own benefits selfishly. The undoubted consequence of this conflict is inequality between the values of transacted commodities. These linguistic results have been supported in this paper by economic data on barters, environmental data on Arabian Peninsula, and eventually Qur'anic usages of this root.

All literal and metaphorical usages of the root "*sh-r-y*" demonstrate that it is an unfair barter exchange in which the value of transacted commodities is unequal. Bartering error for guidance, torment for forgiveness, disbelief for faith, worldly life for hereafter etc. which have been mentioned in the Qur'an several times witness to all preceding results.

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