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ISLAMIC LEGAL RULINGS ON BACKBITING (GHIBAH) AND SLANDER (BUHTAN) ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Abstract. *This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the legal and ethical foundations of backbiting (ghibah) and slander (buhtan) on digital platforms. Drawing on official documents of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the article broadly addresses the application of ethical and legal norms in social media, the adverse social impact of ghibah and buhtan, and the responsibility of both society and the individual in preventing them. The study scientifically substantiates the harmony between Islamic values and national-legal foundations in the contemporary digital environment.*

Keywords: *ghibah, buhtan, digital platform, Islamic law, social media, ethical norms, slander, information ethics, Uzbekistan, fatwa.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, digital platforms and social media in particular are becoming the primary means of information exchange, communication, and the sharing of ideas among people. In the Republic of Uzbekistan as well, the level of social media use among members of society is high as a result of the wide introduction of digital technologies, and this is increasing the urgency of ethical and legal questions. In particular, negative vices such as backbiting (ghibah) and slander (buhtan) spread rapidly in the digital environment, and there is a clear necessity to assess their social and psychological consequences from both an Islamic and a national-legal perspective. This article is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the legal bases of ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms, their impact on social life, and the scientific and legal ways of preventing them grounded in official documents of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers. At the same time, the article comprehensively addresses questions of ensuring the harmony of ethical values and legal norms in the contemporary digital environment.

MAIN PART

In studying the questions of ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms, it is first necessary to pay attention to the theoretical and foundational concepts of these vices and their historical development. In Islamic tradition, the rulings on ghibah and buhtan were formed on the basis of the Holy Quran and the hadiths, and the question of applying them to the contemporary digital environment has become a particularly pressing issue in recent years. Studying these matters on the basis of fatwas approved by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and official documents of the Cabinet of Ministers regulating information security and ethical norms is of scholarly and practical importance (Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, 2022a).

The lexical and terminological meanings of the word ghibah are widely elaborated in Islamic sources, where it is interpreted as speaking behind someone's back about things they would dislike or that would cause them harm. Buhtan, meanwhile, encompasses such vices as making unfounded, false accusations against someone, attributing blame without basis, insulting them, and damaging their honour. Official fatwas issued by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan affirm that ghibah and buhtan in any form including when carried out through digital platforms are strictly forbidden in the Sharia and are assessed as a grave sin. In this regard, the Quran in Surah al-Hujurat (49:12) illustrates through the simile «Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?» just how repugnant and grave a sin backbiting is. On the basis of this verse and the hadiths provided as commentary on it, the guidelines developed by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan note that one must not permit ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms either, and that every person must feel accountable for each word and message (Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, 2022a).

In the history of Islam, numerous classical works were created on combating ghibah and buhtan and eradicating them from society. Thinkers such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali and the scholars of the classical tradition deeply analyzed the negative impact of ghibah and buhtan on social life, noting that they lead to the destruction of trust, compassion, harmony, and blessing among people. In the contemporary context, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan drawing on this classical heritage has officially declared that any form of ghibah and buhtan, including that disseminated through the internet and social media, is assessed as a grave sin just as it would be in its traditional form (Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, 2023a). In fatwas announced by the Board, it is specifically emphasized that writing words or messages on

digital platforms that damage someone's honour, making unfounded accusations or insulting statements, sharing or disseminating them with others all of this is forbidden (haram), and such actions may give rise not only to religious but also to legal accountability.

In the official decisions of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan regulating information security and ethical norms, the dissemination of any information on social media that damages someone's honour, dignity, and business reputation is prohibited, and administrative and criminal liability for such actions has been established. The fact that these legal norms are in organic harmony with the religious-ethical guidelines developed by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan that is, that the positions of the state and religious institutions on this matter complement each other is of scholarly and practical importance (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2021). For example, in the resolution approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2021 on «Strengthening Ethical Standards in the Field of Information and Mass Communications,» the necessity of preventing actions on the internet that encroach upon someone's honour, family secrets, and personal life, degrade them, or slander them, and of taking strict measures against such conduct, is established.

On the theoretical level, concepts and rulings elaborated by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan on the rulings concerning ghibah and buhtan are directly linked to classical Islamic sources. At the same time, it has been clearly defined that new forms of these vices appearing in the contemporary digital environment such as insulting someone through anonymous accounts on social media, making unfounded accusations, spreading fake news, revealing personal secrets also fall within the scope of ghibah and buhtan (Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, 2022b). In an official statement issued by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan in 2022, it is affirmed that any negative information disseminated on digital platforms if it causes harm to someone's honour and dignity, or constitutes an unfounded accusation is forbidden (haram) from the Sharia perspective, and that there is not only moral but also legal accountability for such actions. This statement reminds every citizen and user that spreading «fake» (false) information, disseminating manipulated photos and videos, revealing secrets related to someone's family or personal life, making unfounded accusations, and committing ghibah on social media are acts for which each person is personally responsible.

From the perspective of empirical research and practice, the results of monitoring conducted by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and under the Cabinet of Ministers show that

cases of ghibah and buhtan on social media are increasing. In particular, special monitoring groups organized by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan in 2023 identified and submitted to the relevant authorities thousands of cases of unfounded accusations, slander, and ghibah on religious, political, and social topics on social media (Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, 2023b). On the basis of these monitoring results, preventive educational measures, public oversight mechanisms, and mechanisms of cooperation to combat ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms are being developed. At the same time, through the «Online Fatwa» project being implemented by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, advice and recommendations are being given on strengthening ethical and religious values on digital platforms, refraining from ghibah and buhtan, and shaping an internet culture.

On the question of ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms, the official positions of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers reflect the harmony of national and religious values. In this regard, it is repeatedly emphasized that every citizen and user must feel moral and legal accountability for their actions, use freedom of speech and information on social media correctly, and respect the honour and dignity of others. As affirmed by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, disseminating unfounded or insulting words about someone on the internet or other digital platforms, committing ghibah, or engaging in buhtan as a consequence of the user's actions will give rise to accountability not only in this world but in the hereafter as well (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023). For this reason, official documents openly indicate that observing ethical norms on digital platforms, feeling accountable for each word and action, and strengthening a healthy moral environment in society is the duty of every citizen.

Turning to critical analysis and debates, in some cases the idea of freedom of information and freedom of speech on digital platforms creates certain difficulties in identifying the fine boundaries of ghibah and buhtan. In this regard, the official guidelines of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers firmly establish that freedom of information and speech is not unlimited it is bounded by the honour, dignity, and rights of other persons. From this standpoint, any critical opinion or comment on social media may be assessed as an unfounded accusation or buhtan if it damages someone's honour and reputation. This demands a high level of moral culture and responsibility from users. In recommendations developed by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, particular emphasis is placed on strengthening

ethical values on the internet and digital platforms, refraining from ghibah and buhtan, feeling accountable for each word and message, and preserving social solidarity and harmony.

On the basis of the above analysis, it may be stated that the rulings on ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms are clearly and plainly defined in the official documents of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers, and that they serve to ensure a healthy moral environment in society, protect the rights of individuals, and strengthen social stability. In the contemporary digital environment, the harmony of Islamic and national-legal values, the effective means of combating ghibah and buhtan, and the enhancement of societal and individual responsibility are ensured through these efforts. The scholarly, practical, and preventive measures being undertaken in this direction are of great importance for the development of ethical and legal culture in Uzbek society.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the scholarly analyses and official documents presented above, it may be concluded that questions of ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms are clearly and plainly expressed in the official positions of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers. Ghibah and buhtan in any form including on the internet and social media are assessed as a grave sin in the Sharia and, from a national and legal standpoint, as conduct that must be severely punished. Every citizen and user on digital platforms must feel moral and legal accountability for their actions, respect the honour and dignity of others, and value Islamic and national values. On the basis of fatwas, guidelines, and resolutions developed by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers, preventive and educational measures aimed at strengthening moral culture in society and preventing ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms are being implemented. Such a comprehensive approach serves to ensure a healthy moral and legal environment in the contemporary digital space, protect the rights and honour of individuals, and strengthen social stability. In conclusion, refraining from ghibah and buhtan on digital platforms is not only a religious and legal duty for every citizen, but also a moral obligation; and the strengthening of these values constitutes an important factor for the progress and prosperity of society (Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, 2022a; Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2021).

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