

Islam and Poverty: A Different View

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Poverty has been the universal fact of human society. It was and is prevalent almost in the entire part of the world societies. Poverty, as a word is very common in every day life but as a concept it is not as simple. It has been one among the universal problems, from which humanity suffered a lot. In reaction of the suffering many solutions were offered. These solutions were in the form of schemes at individual as well as at organizational level and in the form of ideologies also. Ideologies, advocated for the removal of poverty, provided a platform to intellectuals for academic discourse. Consequently ideologies were given acceptance from some corner of the society as well as rejection from other. The end result is the persistency of poverty in almost all the societies.

Islam, as an important and dominating ideology of the world, has also offered solution to the problem that tried to deal at psychological, social and organizational level. Now it is well recognized that poverty is not something related with social exploitation only rather it is related with individual will also. That is why no ideology or scheme can get success in eradicating poverty if it leaves any of the above dimensions. This is the subject matter of this paper that how Islam approach and address the poverty and what is lacking today.

The poverty as a concept, as it is hinted in preceding lines, is not very simple. The purpose of this statement here is not to involve in huge academic exercise related to the concept but this is just to introduce the dimensions responsible for this conceptual ambiguity.

The real problem of conceptual ambiguity arises when the concept was tried to objectify. It has been classified in to three categories: Absolute poverty, Relative poverty and Subjective poverty. Absolute poverty is generally used for the implementation of schemes etc. because it gives a very objective answer about the people concern.

Measures of absolute poverty are usually based upon the idea of subsistence. That is people who do not have the resources to lead and maintain human life are below poverty line. Again the resources to lead a human life can be measured in units, may be of rupees or calories per day. According to the supporters of absolute poverty this measurement should be universal and applicable everywhere.

At the contrary, according to the advocators of relative poverty, it can be measured only in relation to the people living in a particular area. For example, a millionaire among billionaires may suffer from relative poverty despite of having resources more than his needs to lead a human life.

The third one that is subjective poverty is highly subjective as its name unfolds. It is a feeling of a man to be poor in relation to his own previous state of wealth. For example, when a billionaire became millionaire may develop a feeling of poverty. This kind of feeling is known as subjective poverty.

The deep and detailed discussion does not have very close relation with the thrust of the paper though a brief touch has been felt necessary just to be familiar with the basic concepts overtly.

Coming to the core of the paper, that how Islam tries to eliminate poverty from human society, it is well safe to assume that Islam guarantees prosperity, distribution of wealth and considers poverty as a disease. Qur'an and Hadith provide many moral, ethical injections as well as laws to cure this social disease.

If we have a look on the scholarly papers and books written on Islam and poverty, we find them generally talking about charity, social security, equal distribution of wealth etc. But in this paper I will try to minimize the pain of reading by avoiding repetition about charity, zakat and equal distribution of wealth. At another dimension on which I want to differ from the writings on the subject are the causes of poverty. In most of the writings either we do not have discussions on causes or lack of education as the most important cause, which Islam does not subscribe.

Focusing on causes does not mean that remedies are not important both are interlinked and interconnected with each other. The whole purpose to put the matter into cause and effect manner is to make it more understandable.

After having a look on the ethical, moral guidance and principles related to economic activities prescribed by Islam it is much safe to deduce that a man may only remain poor if:

- *He himself does not want to earn*
- *Lacks social security to get a chance to materialize his interest and*
- *He is extravagant.*

Finally we can say that these are three major causes responsible for poverty. The most notable and interesting thing here is that two of them are under the control of individual itself. An individual need not any external support to eliminate the first and the third cause. As mentioned earlier that the social security, which is the second cause, was devoted much attention by the scholars so I decided not to explore on it.

As for as the first cause is concerned it is not very simple and objective to be understand. No body in the world is not in desire to earn. But the question is that how much is he making efforts to earn and how much sincere is he in doing so? Many times we have heard Ulmas saying in their speeches that 'O believers believe in Allah'. What does it mean? Ulmas ask the question and answer it that mere claim is not enough to get any

thing rather it requires sufficient action in support of the claim. If we put the claim of people to earn, in this context then we have to observe that whether the claimer has some action in support of his claim or not.

Of course there are many sayings of Prophet and Qu'ranic injunctions in promotion of earning. Qur'an says that

“then when the prayer is finished, you may disperse through the land and seek the bounty of Allah”. (Juma:10)

“do they not see that we have created for them the of what our hands have created, the cattle, so that they are their owners” (Yaseen:71)

“take alms from their wealth” (Tauba:103)

“and that you strive hard and fight in the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives” (Saff:11)

All these verses advocate the cause of earning directly and by giving the concept of private property. Having private property itself is a big motive to earn. There are sayings in one of them Prophet says ‘O my Lord protect me from incapability and laziness’. There are many evidences in the Hadith literature favouring and admiring work and earning.

Now putting the claim and supporting actions together I would like to share some personal experiences which are very much relevant. The city in which I live is a metro city. It has a huge Muslim population as auto rickshaw drivers. Whenever I came to hire an auto I hardly find a Muslim auto wala ready to go by meter. He always tried to fix the amount before starting the auto. On asking his usual reply was *nahi bhai meter khrab hai or meter se nahi jayen ge* (Meter is not working or will not go on meter).

The message that I want to convey is the auto wala has taken the auto to earn money. He has left his house with his auto with the intention that he will come back with some earning at evening. He has the wish to earn. But the behaviour and action he is delivering is not supporting his will and intention. No body is willing to pay more except under certain compulsions. So such auto walas hinder themselves to be hired by their actions.

Personally when I felt this intentionally I enquired Muslim auto walas and found the same conclusion that their actions are not supportive to their will. And if the action is not supportive, may be knowingly or unknowingly, it means people do not have the will to earn or in other words they do not want to earn.

This is very important aspect of the aforementioned cause of poverty. It should be understood by Ulamas and should be propagated by their sermons in the way as they propagate and explain the verse ‘O believers do believe’.

The third cause which is about extravagancy is important and sample to understand. The interesting aspect of this cause is that its positivity is in the control of man but its negativity is beyond its control. A man is having full control on not to spent thing he has that is the positivity but he does not have control on the expenses he desires. It has an uncontrolled check in the sense that he can not spend the thing he does not have and it is the negativity.

Finally I want to conclude the paper by saying that these issues should be re looked into. This is the responsibility of Ulmas to revisit the problem in the given dimension and propagate it thoroughly that will help in eliminating poverty among Muslims. The will and supportive action model may be implemented for the purpose of analysis not only at rickshaw puller level but at the level of shop keepers' behaviour and at all other levels.