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Item Type	Preprint
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Download date	2026-11-04 11:37:13
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/182643

IS ISLAM COMPATIBLE WITH SOCIALISM?

Asghar Ali Engineer

A friend wrote to me that I write whether Islam is compatible with socialism as for many the very word socialism means an atheistic philosophy and hence not acceptable in any case. Very core of Islamic teachings is belief in one God so how Islam and socialism can go together. This, I think, is not correct view. Even many noted ulama had accepted socialism as essential part of Islamic teachings. Two noted ulama of Indian sub-continent i.e. Maulana Hasrat Mohani and Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi enthusiastically supported communist movement and Maulana Hasrat Mohani was one of the founders of the communist party in India. Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi who had migrated to Afghanistan during the Khilafat movement and had formed a transition government along with Majaraja Pratapsingh left for Russia when King of Afghanistan came under pressure from the British to expel the members this government and met Lenin and discussed with him the strategies to fight British colonialism in India. He remained underground for quite some time and returned to India only in early forties of last century.

The poet –philosopher Iqbal also paid rich tribute to socialism in his Khizr-e-Rah which he wrote after decline of Usmani power in Turkey and on the eve of Russian revolution. He also paid rich tribute to Marx and called him man with Book but without being prophet (*paighambar nist wale dar baghal darad kitab*). He also wrote an interesting poem "*Lenin Khuda Ke Huzur Mein*" (Lenin in presence of God). Also a left-inclined Christian priest who taught in Government College Lahore for in 1030s and was noted scholar of Islam writes in his book *Islam in the Modern World* that Islam was the first organized socialist movement in the world. And not without reason.

It is interesting to note that Islam showed not only deep sympathy for the poor and downtrodden but also condemned strongly concentration of wealth in number of Meccan surahs. Mecca, in those days, was an important centre of international trade and, like in our days, there were very rich (generally tribal and clan chiefs) and extremely poor, on the other. Thus in surahs 104 and 107 (both Meccan) we find such condemnation. And in one of the Medinese verses 9:34 we find condemnation of concentration of wealth. It says, ""…And those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in Allah's way- announce to them a painful chastisement."

This verse too condemns hoarding of wealth and Abu Dharr, one of the EMINENT COMPANIONS OF THE Prophet (PBUH) used to recite this verse before those who would accumulate wealth and refuse to shake hands with such people. Thus those with whom Abu Dharr shook hands, would consider himself as a proud man and even boast about it. Abu Dharr was uncompromising man and because of that died a lonely death in the desert of Rabza wherein he was exiled. His wife did not find enough money to buy shroud and had to be buried in his clothes.

Qur'an even goes to the extent of advising the believers to spend all that which is more than one needs. The word used by the Qur'an is *'afw* i.e. whatever is left after meeting ones basic needs. Thus this verse 2:219 says, "They ask you as to what they should spend. Say what is

surplus with you". Thus it comes very close to the socialist formulation to each according to ones need. The Qur'an's basic emphasis is on justice ('adl) and in fact one of Allah's name is 'Aadil i.e. Just. Thus an unjust society cannot be an Islamic society. Unfortunately none of Islamic countries today can fulfill these Qur'anic criteria.

Justice in Qur'an is so important that it says "Do justice, it is closest to being pious" (5:8) and also it says that justice must be done even if it goes against you and in favour of your enemy. Thus the Qur'an says, "O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah, even though it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives –whether he be rich or poor. (4:135). And what is socialism without justice in very comprehensive sense including distributive justice. And if these verses are read in conjunction with chapters 104 and 107 distributive justice cannot be excluded.

The Qur'an also uses other terms to make its intention clear i.e. *mustakbirun* and *mustad'ifun* i.e. the powerful and exploiters and weak and exploited. These are really key terms in this respect. All Allah's Prophets belonged to weaker sections of society like Abrham, Moses and others who fought against the powerful and exploiters like Nimrud and Firaun (i.e. Nimrod and Pharoah). According to Qur'an struggle between *mustakbirun and mustad'ifun* will go on and in the end it is *mustad'ifun* who will be triumphant and will inherit this earth (28:5).

Thus Qur'an is unmistakably in favour of the weaker section of society and it predicts leadership (though not dictatorship) of proletariat. It is interesting to note that it was Imam Khomeini who drew our attention to this verse (28:5) and he also established bunyad-i-mustad'ifin (Foundation for the weak) from the wealth of the rich which he ordered to be confiscated. Unfortunately, like other revolutions, Iranian revolution was also jijack3ed by the vested interests. As soon as any political establishment comes into existence, vested interests develop around it and hijack it, more often than not. Thus any revolution needs constant vigilance on the part of the weaker sections. Islamic revolution met the same fate within few years of the death of the Prophet (PBUH).

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Mumbai