ISLAMIC SOCIALISM IN PAKISTAN: AN OVERVIEW

HARVIE M. CONN

In 1971, Hafeez Malik described Pakistan's attitude to Socialism as "a glaring contrast" to its acceptance by the Afro-Asian world. "Pakistan has not only repudiated Socialism, but in the process of her economic and political development, has created an intellectual climate conducive to the growth of Capitalism." A more recent survey by Nasim Jawed has made a much more careful evaluation of the situation in the light of the discussions following the June, 1965, proposal in the National Assembly for nationalization of major industries in accordance with socialist principles consistent with Islam. Jawed's survey continues to characterize as a "relative minority" those who describe Islam in Pakistan as socialistic, but he notes that "their proportion still seems to represent a considerable increase over the past years and, therefore, constitutes a new development." What is the ideological background to these current discussions? What accounts for the shape of that current discussion? And how should one evaluate the opposition to a socialist interpretation of Islam in Pakistan?

Ideological Background

The attraction of the Indo-Pakistani Muslims to Socialism is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1920s, at least three theories of Islamic Socialism have been advocated in the Indian sub-continent. One of the earliest was that of 'Ubayd Allāh Sindhi. The only political thinker of any calibre to come directly into contact with Russian communism at an early stage, he nevertheless distanced himself from the atheistic basis of the system but urged Muslims "to evolve for themselves a religious basis to arrive at the economic justice at which communism aims but which it cannot fully achieve." While he saw both Islamic and Communist economic philosophies as agreed that the process of the distribution of wealth should be "from each according to his ability," Islam is seen as
moving from “each according to his need” rather than to “each according to his work.” The lines he draws for Islamic Socialism move more towards that of a Western welfare state, though he does not rule out the desirability of socialism by evolution in a democratic society, and in those areas now constituting Pakistan. Theistic socialism would give the peasant and the labourer a much fairer way of life than a purely materialistic communist state.6

A more tangible impact of Marxism seems to have been made on Ḥifẓ al-Raḥmān Sīhwārwī. Sīhwārwī sees Islam and Marxism sharing five elements in common: (1) prohibition of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the privileged classes (2) organization of the economic structure of the state to ensure social welfare (3) equality of opportunity for all human beings (4) priority of collective social interest over individual privilege (5) prevention of the permanentizing of class structure through social revolution. The motivations for many of these themes he draws from the Qurʾān, which he understands as seeking to create an economic order in which the rich pay excessive though voluntary taxes to minimize differences in living standards (his theory of zakāt). Sīhwārwī sees privilege as a test Allāh has prescribed for the affluent to honour their social obligations through self-denial and under-privilege as a test for the poor to strive, earn and improve their social level. Islamic socialism then takes the form of a “pincer movement of hard self-denying generosity by the rich and ceaseless effort and work by the poor to bridge the gulf which divides the classes.”7

In two areas, then, Sīhwārwī saw Islam and communism diverge—in Islam’s sanction of private ownership within certain limits, and in its refusal to recognize an absolutely classless basis of society. Islam, through its prohibition of the accumulation of wealth, was said to be able to control the class structure through equality of opportunity. Unlike Sindhī, Sīhwārwī says little of the atheistic character to communism’s materialism. His concern was with the economics of socialist theory.

The third major theory of Pakistani socialism appeared after the emergence of Pakistan with the work of Khalīfa ‘Abd al-Ḥākim, (1894—1959), and what might be regarded as the contemporary model. Characterized by Aziz Ahmad as a socialist shift “towards left-of-the-centre liberalism,”8 Ḥākim sees Islamic socialism as harnessing the freedom of thought, action and enterprise characteristic of Western democracies to Sīhwārwī’s
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guiding principle of the equality of opportunity for all. Ideally interpreted and externalized into society, Islam is socialism in its own right.⁹

From Ḥakīm’s concept of land as the principle source of economic wealth, came the moral basis for agrarian reforms in Pakistan. He maintained, “the spirit of the Qur’ānic teaching is that land is like the other free gifts of God, (and) the owner of land is a kin of trustee for the community. If,... owing to a particular system of abuse or use the land is not yielding as much as it should, the state has a right to step in.”¹⁰

As with the other models we have sketched, Ḥakīm’s views of socialism did not reject private ownership as inimical to traditional Muslim thought. So too, reminiscent of Sīhwārī, he sees the obligation to pay zakāt as one of the duties of the affluent. “By promulgating the laws of inheritance regarding property together with the zakāt and the prohibition of usury, Islam, in the eyes of Dr. Ḥakīm, eliminated the possibility of wealth concentrating in progressively fewer hands. Also in this way Islam created an elaborate plan of social welfare for the worker and the needy.”¹¹

Current Discussion

Several features of this ideological background continue to play prominent parts in Pakistan’s discussion of socialism in the 1960s. Jawed’s survey indicates that “most supporters of Islamic socialism hold it to be basically different from communism. Only one of the respondents in our survey... understood Islamic socialism to be similar to any non-Islamic socialism. Emphasizing the differences between Islamic socialism and communism, almost all of the rest claimed that Islamic socialism is theistic and/or that its concern for social justice originates from spiritual values rather than from the self-interest of the economically deprived calss.”¹²

So too, current attitudes toward private ownership reflect these earlier theories. “A large majority (92% in East Pakistan and 71% in West Pakistan) of the ‘ulamā’ opted for private property.” 7% of the middle class professionals in East Pakistan favoured a system exclusively of private ownership while 28% opted for an economic system which accommodates both private and public ownership of the means of production.¹³

The scope of public and private ownership also reflects earlier theorizing. “Almost all the ‘ulamā’ (100% in East Pakistan and 94%
in West Pakistan) would allow both public and private enterprise. Also a large majority of the middle-class professionals (73.8% in West Pakistan) would do likewise, but about one-fifth of them (18.5%) would have a system mainly of public enterprise. By contrast, over 60% of the middle-class professionals in East Pakistan would like to have public enterprise and to limit private enterprise to the minimum. About 60% of them would allow both types of entrepreneurship. The picture is similar with respect to the question of the society's collective responsibility for providing the basic needs of the poor, "Among the professionals in East Pakistan a majority (63%) opted for equitable distribution of wealth on the basis of need and merit. Another 30% desired to have a social security scheme, only 7% while were satisfied with the existing arrangements of allowing each individual only his earned income."

The overall picture then in Pakistan regarding socialism is a mixed picture among middle-class professionals. 55% in East Pakistan and 19% in West Pakistan declared themselves in favour of a socialism defined by Jawed as "those in favour of nationalization of the major sources of production and who wanted distribution of wealth on the basis of need along with merit." 29.4% of the same grouping in West Pakistan and 37.3% in East Pakistan supported a "mixed economy," that is, an economy in which the government participated in some sectors, in which a social security programme would be erected to meet the needs of the poor, but without a forceful or large-scale nationalization.

Behind these discussions on socialism lies the deep conviction that real Islam requires a socialist system. The argument takes several lines.

1. Quoting the Qur'anic verse, "man is entitled only to what is due to his effort," some have argued that Islam regards labour as the sole value in economic production, and socialism to be the order which best enforces this Qur'anic dictum through its denial of private property and private enterprise. This is reinforced by Islam's disapproval of usury, again interpreted by the socialists as a forbidding of interest since it is a concession to capital and not a reward for labour.

2. The verse, "the land belongs to God" (Sūra 7:128), is taken by the socialists as a denial of private ownership of land. Ghulām Aḥmad Perwēz (1903— ) a leading Pakistani socialist theoretician, has reinforced this by his insistence on the Islamic principle of equal opportunity for all. Even the limited right of man to use the land is not a private
but a collective, right of humanity at large, subject to the condition of equal use and enjoyment by all men. Only the government, acting as the representative of the entire society, can rightfully regulate the use of land for the benefit of all.

(3) Other socialists, like Muḥammed Sarwar, stress the Islamic mission of the eradication of all injustices and cruelties from society. Islam is thus viewed as a socio-economic movement, and the Prophet is interpreted as a revolutionary leader, seeking to put an end to the capitalist exploitation of the Quraysh merchants and the corrupt bureaucracy of Byzantium and Persia.

(4) Perwēz also supports socialism with a new interpretation of Islamic eschatology. Hell is re-interpreted to mean not a metaphysical abode of men after death but "that society in which men, dominated by its evil socio-economic system, struggle to accumulate wealth. Men in such a society thus become the victims of their own mutual competition and enmity, whose fire eventually consumes them. They define heaven as a society free from distinctions of social classes, and characterized by justice, peace, and cooperation." In similar allegorical style, the Qur'ānic story of the fall of man is reinterpreted. The "forbidden tree" becomes a symbol of wealth, and it is forbidden since, in its acquisition lays a potential source of conflict.

(5) Building on the Qur'ānic definition of true knowledge, Parwēz sees three responsibilities for men: seeing, hearing and sensing through the agency of the mind. Consequently, real knowledge is based on empirically verifiable observation, the role of science. To him poverty is the punishment of God and deserved by those who ignore science. Unlike Ḥakīm, Parwēz pays close attention to the role of science as well as agrarian reform, in a developing industrialized economy.

Jawed sees several factors as influencing this increase in popularity of socialistic ideas in Pakistan. First, the impact of western ideas is strong on those already inclined toward a secularistic interpretation of Islam. Second, Muslim modernism's separation of Islamic religion from Islamic jurisprudence, allows for a greater capacity of accommodation to any temporal, cultural ideational changes that may be held desirable. Thus socialism can be presented as that system of law which best complements and realizes in the contemporary world the eternal values of Islamic religion. Third, in this same connection, Islamic law can be castigated not simply
for failing to realize Islamic goals but for actually frustrating them ever since the early history of Islam. Socialism then becomes a correction of the medieval distortion of Islam through *Shari'a*. Fourth, economic insecurity and intense job competition in Pakistan have strong appeal for an alternate economic system which promises social justice.24

*Opposition to Socialism*

The main ideological opposition to socialism in Pakistan comes from three different sources, not all of equal importance or emphasis. Those inclined toward liberal democracy form a sizeable proportion of the population but appear to be least interested in ideological debate.

The second group centres in the religio-political party known as Jamāʿat-i-Islāmī, organized in 1941 around the religious fundamentalist, Abūʾl-ʿAlā Mawdūdī (1903— ).25 "By far the most dynamic and well-organized challenge modernist Islam has been facing in India and especially in Pakistan,"26 the movement has more recently shown poorly in general elections and, in re-evaluating its ideological stand, gives some evidence of embracing a part of the economic programme it has set out to reject.27

For Mawdūdī, Islam offers a golden mean between capitalism and Marxism, between a commercial oligarchy built on capitalist usury and a bureaucratic oligarchy built on the tyranny of totalitarianism. According to Mawdūdī, Islam emphasizes only two social controls: (a) fear of God (b) man's sense of responsibility before God. Since the Prophet never questioned the moral or legal aspects of the early converts' possessions, refusing to impose price controls on food even during a Medina famine, all man-made controls to regulate the economy must be rejected by Islam. In Islamic society it is the individual who forms the basic unit.28 The contract is between God and individual men and women, not between the deity and an ethnic group.

This does not mean that the Islamic economy is not completely uncontrolled. It is rather a free enterprise system guided by three divine laws — the mandatory *zakāt*, interest free banking, and the laws of inheritance. These laws are said to adequately regulate the economy and the market.

The rights of ownership sanctioned by the *Shari'a* are inalienable. And, in view of this principle, any amount of land can be privately owned,
and should be bought and sold without any restriction like other commodities in the market. Cooperative farms should be created only after obtaining the consent of the land-owners, and only upon guarantee of their proprietary rights.²⁹

In all of this, the government functions as a benevolent policeman who guides but never forbids. So before an industry is established, the government should determine whether or not it would displace labour and if so, provide the workers with alternative jobs. To the state also should belong the responsibility of formulating equitable principles of conduct. The role of the state is fulfilled in the coordination of industrial and business activities for the maintenance of a healthy economy.

By far the strongest and most influential opposition to socialism comes from the traditional ‘ulamā‘, and mainly on religious grounds. The focus of their criticism is mirrored typically in the fatwā subscribed to by 230 ‘ulamā‘ from both West and East Pakistan in 1970, denouncing socialism as kufr (anti-Islam). Among other things, the fatwā contends socialism is un-Islamic because abolishing private property would render half of the Qur‘ān useless. It repudiates those who see private property as unjust and permit violent dispossession of the wealthy from their wealth, calling them rebels against the Qur‘ān and the Sunna. Sharing the activities of such political parties is said to amount to aiding in the destruction of Islam. Voting for them, or aiding them financially, is kufr and harām (religiously forbidden).³⁰

Jawed’s survey reinforces the strength of this opposition. 92% of the ‘ulamā‘ in East Pakistan and 71% in West Pakistan opted for private property. None of the ‘ulamā‘ from either region would allow nationalization of the existing private property.⑳ The pattern is even more pronounced over the question of the production of wealth. 100% in East Pakistan and 94% in West Pakistan would allow both public and private enterprise. A noticeable difference between the ‘ulamā‘ of East and West Pakistan appears in the question of the distribution of wealth. 91.7% in East Pakistan would allow each individual only his own earned income. Only 41.2% shared this opinion in West Pakistan.³²

Overall, 91.7% of the ‘ulamā‘ of East Pakistan favoured a free economic system, with 0.0% for a socialist. And in the West, the figure supporting a free system was 70.6% with 0.0% for a socialist.³³ The statistics are clear indications of the massive nature of the opposition.
How will one explain this opposition? Jawed sees three factors as largely responsible: (1) the centuries of recognition of free, private enterprise by the traditional Shari'a still fully authoritative for the 'ulamā', and (2) the 'ulamā’s long standing distrust toward the government of the day. “Only against outside non-Muslim threat did the ‘ulamā’ recognize the government as the rightful representative and manager of the Muslim society. At most other times their support of the sultan was only grudgingly given in view of the indispensable need for law and order.”
(3) the association of socialism with atheistic and revolutionary communism by the ‘ulamā’.

Epilogue

Against the background of these views, a few tentative conclusions can be drawn. A national consensus among Pakistani leaders regarding the economic framework of the society seems to remain basically friendly to that of Western capitalism. This framework continues to be reinforced by appeals to Islamic structure.

At the same time, among the modern educated middle class, socialism has won converts, and there seems likelihood for expecting this appeal to grow in the near future. The freedom with which the Muslim hermeneutic of modernism interprets the Qur'ān and the Shari'a allows greater leeway for such shifts than the fundamentalistic approach of the ‘ulamā’ and the opposition forces.

Perwēz’ writings also signal possible changes in the future. “The human condition is envisaged as totally hopeless. The Muslim religious leaders, the Marxists and the Western exponents of democracy, are all lumped together in a box marked sterile and destructive. The cry is for the deus ex machina of a governing elite to redeem the times, not merely by reform, but by changing the nature of man. This despair is new, in the context of Islamic modernism; the mood of the earlier reformers had been an enthusiastic hopefulness about man’s capacity to act and to build constructively.” Perwēz’ work taken as a symbol of young Pakistanis seriously alienated from their society may be an indication that doors now closed to socialism will open wider in a more desperate future.
Notes


3. The proposal opened what Jawed calls "an unceasing discussion, often heated, and arguments, sometimes leading to violence" in journalistic media and public forums (ibid., 196).

4. Ibid., 201.


6. Ibid., p. 201.

7. Ibid., p. 203.

8. Ibid., p. 206.

9. Ibid., p. 207.


13. Ibid., 214.


15. Ibid., 215.

16. Ibid., 197.


21. Ibid., 203.

22. Sūra 17:36, "And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge; for every act of hearing or seeing or of sensing will be enquired into."


31. *Ibid.*, 214. By contrast, 65% of the middle-class professionals in East Pakistan were in favour of common ownership of property and for nationalization of the major sources of production.


