



Islamic Strategies for Combating Poverty: An Analytical Study of Religious Teachings and Socioeconomic Implications

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Abstract

Poverty is a persistent social phenomenon that affects individuals and societies across the globe. While many global systems have attempted to address it, Islam—as a comprehensive and holistic religion—offers a unique perspective grounded in both spiritual and socio-economic dimensions. Contrary to some misconceptions that associate Islam with the promotion or romanticizing of poverty, Islamic teachings view poverty as a potential danger to faith, ethics, and social harmony.

This study explores the Islamic perspective on poverty and identifies religiously endorsed strategies for its eradication or mitigation. It aims to clarify Islamic positions on wealth, labor, economic justice, and charitable obligations, while examining how these principles contribute to the formation of a just and secure society.

Using a qualitative analytical method, the study draws upon primary Islamic sources such as the Qur'an, Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the insights of early scholars including Ali ibn Abi Talib and Imam Abu Hanifa. The research also engages with relevant socio-economic concepts to contextualize the applicability of Islamic strategies to contemporary realities.

Findings indicate that Islam encourages lawful work, economic self-reliance, and social responsibility, while strongly opposing financial corruption, exploitation, and hoarding of wealth. Mechanisms such as zakat, sadaqah, prohibition of usury, and mutual aid are presented as practical tools for reducing poverty and redistributing wealth. The Prophet's supplications against poverty, along with statements from his companions condemning it, reflect a consistent position that poverty is not an ideal but a condition to be overcome.

The study concludes that Islam offers a comprehensive and ethically grounded framework for addressing poverty. Its emphasis on justice, dignity, and economic balance offers valuable insights for contemporary societies seeking sustainable solutions to poverty. Integrating these principles into modern systems could promote greater social cohesion, equity, and well-being.

Keywords: Islamic economics, poverty eradication, social justice, zakat, sadaqah, economic ethics, Islamic teachings, wealth distribution, moral economy, anti-poverty strategies.

Introduction

Poverty remains one of the most critical challenges facing modern societies, affecting millions of people worldwide and undermining efforts toward sustainable development, justice, and peace. Despite various policies and development programs implemented by governments and international institutions, poverty continues to persist and even deepen in certain regions. This reality has prompted renewed interest in alternative frameworks and value-based approaches to socioeconomic justice. One such approach is found within Islamic teachings, which view poverty not as a virtue to be pursued but as a social ill that must be addressed through practical, ethical, and spiritual means.

Islam is a comprehensive way of life that encompasses all dimensions of human existence—spiritual, moral, social, and economic. The Islamic worldview presents an integrated system that emphasizes the dignity of human beings, the fair distribution of wealth, and collective responsibility toward the vulnerable. Contrary to misconceptions that Islam endorses ascetic poverty, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions actively sought to combat poverty through work, social support, and economic reforms. Classical and contemporary Islamic scholars alike have consistently warned against the dangers of poverty and have emphasized the necessity of proactive, systemic efforts to reduce it.

This study explores the foundational Islamic principles and practical strategies aimed at eradicating or minimizing poverty. By examining religious texts and scholarly insights, the research offers a deeper understanding of how Islam addresses economic imbalance and promotes a socially just order.

Despite the rich ethical and economic teachings of Islam concerning poverty alleviation, there remains a gap in effectively translating these principles into practical strategies within many Muslim societies. Furthermore, the persistence of poverty among Muslim communities raises questions about the implementation and understanding of Islamic approaches to socioeconomic justice.

How does Islam conceptualize poverty, and what strategies does it offer for its reduction or elimination within a just and moral economic framework? This research is significant because it bridges the gap between classical Islamic teachings and contemporary economic challenges. It contributes to the broader discourse on faith-based solutions to global poverty and highlights Islam's potential role in developing ethical and effective models for socioeconomic development. Understanding Islamic strategies not only serves Muslim societies but also provides valuable insights for global efforts in creating inclusive and equitable economies.

The goal of this study is to analyze the Islamic perspective on poverty and to identify the ethical, legal, and social strategies proposed by Islam for its eradication or limitation. It aims to demonstrate that Islamic teachings advocate for economic productivity, wealth circulation, and collective welfare as central tools in combating poverty.

Poverty, as a multifaceted socio-economic issue, has been the subject of extensive analysis in both secular and religious scholarship. From a secular economic standpoint, poverty is often defined in terms of income inequality, lack of access to resources, and systemic barriers to employment and education. However, Islamic scholarship extends this understanding by embedding it within a framework of spiritual, moral, and communal responsibility.

Classical Islamic sources lay a solid foundation for addressing poverty. The Qur'an frequently emphasizes care for the poor (*fuqarā'*) and the needy (*masākīn*), linking the well-being of society to its treatment of the vulnerable. Verse 9:60 outlines the recipients of zakat, the obligatory alms, which functions as a redistributive tool aimed at reducing economic disparity. Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) described poverty not only as a hardship but as a potential threat to faith and social order, as seen in the hadith: "Poverty may lead to disbelief." (Narrated by Abu Huraira, al-Bukhari). Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) famously said, "If poverty were a man, I would have killed him," indicating the severity with which early Islamic leaders viewed poverty. Similarly, Imam Abu Hanifa stressed that a person preoccupied with daily sustenance is not fit to provide sound consultation—highlighting the psychological and cognitive toll poverty inflicts on individuals. These perspectives reflect a deep awareness within Islamic tradition of the broader impact of poverty, not only on

individuals but also on the moral and political health of society. In modern academic discourse, researchers such as Chapra (2000), Kahf (2007), and Siddiqi (1981) have contributed significantly to the understanding of Islamic economics and its mechanisms for poverty reduction. Chapra argues that Islamic economic principles are inherently people-oriented and emphasize human dignity, justice, and cooperation over competition and profit maximization. According to Kahf, the Islamic financial system, through tools like zakat, waqf (endowment), and interest-free loans, provides an ethical framework that integrates both material welfare and spiritual values. Contemporary Muslim societies, however, face significant challenges in applying these classical strategies due to political instability, economic underdevelopment, and weak institutional frameworks. As noted by Obaidullah and Shirazi (2015), the underutilization of zakat institutions, lack of transparency, and insufficient integration with national economic policies have hindered the potential of Islamic instruments in alleviating poverty. Furthermore, some modern scholars critique the romanticization of asceticism in certain circles, arguing that it diverts attention from the institutional and systemic efforts required to address poverty effectively. Despite these challenges, Islamic economic principles remain relevant in contemporary poverty alleviation strategies, especially in the context of ethical finance, social justice, and wealth redistribution. The existing literature demonstrates that while Islamic teachings provide a clear and comprehensive vision for poverty reduction, there is a need for renewed interpretation and contextual application in today's socio-economic environments..

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and analytical approach. It involves a thorough review of primary Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith, along with classical interpretations and statements of early scholars. Secondary sources, including contemporary academic research and economic studies, are also consulted to contextualize Islamic strategies within modern realities. The study applies thematic analysis to identify core concepts and extract relevant socio-economic frameworks grounded in Islamic thought.

Results & Discussion

Islam is a comprehensive religion that encompasses all aspects of human life, both material and spiritual. As such, it has developed diverse programs and guidelines aimed at enabling people to live peacefully and enjoy a dignified existence. Poverty, meanwhile, is a pervasive social phenomenon that exists in all societies and is experienced by many individuals throughout their lives. Fundamentally, Islam teaches that individuals should be content with what God has provided for them, refrain from publicly expressing their needs or asking others to fulfill them, and instead turn to God for assistance in alleviating their poverty.

Nevertheless, some individuals consistently portray themselves as poor and publicly display their deprivation, which in turn diminishes their dignity. On the other hand, Islam strongly encourages individuals to engage in work, to strive for self-sufficiency, and to extend help to the poor and needy.

The material needs of human beings are among the essential realities of life, and Islam has always emphasized the importance of fulfilling these needs in lawful and ethical ways. It encourages people to work and to earn their livelihood through legitimate means. Contrary to the belief held by some that Islam idealizes or promotes poverty, the Islamic tradition views poverty as a potential cause of corruption and even equates it with disbelief. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sought refuge from poverty and urged his followers to seek wealth through permissible and honest means. Islam has outlined various approaches and strategies for addressing and reducing poverty and has firmly opposed economic and financial corruption, including bribery, embezzlement, and usurpation. (Shahroudi, 2005).

The Companions of the Prophet (may Allah be pleased with them) strongly condemned poverty. Imam Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) famously declared, "If poverty were a man, I would have killed him," expressing the deep disdain for the destructive nature of poverty. Likewise, some early Muslim scholars stated, "When poverty enters a land, disbelief says to it: 'Take me with you,'" underscoring the close link between poverty and spiritual or moral decline. Imam Abu Hanifa (may Allah have mercy on him) also emphasized the detrimental effects of poverty on judgment, stating that it is impermissible to seek counsel from a person who lacks basic provisions in his home, as his mind would be preoccupied with securing his daily sustenance, and thus he would be unable to offer sound and balanced advice.

Poverty is considered a serious threat to faith, ethics, and social stability. It can undermine security and lead to disorder, as reflected in the words of Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him): “I am astonished by the person who cannot find food in his house—how does he not rise up with his sword against the people?” (Al-shuhud,n.d). This illustrates how poverty can push individuals to desperation. When a society experiences stark economic disparity—where one person lives in unimaginable luxury and wealth, using his riches to spread corruption, while others around him cannot even afford their daily meals—this inevitably breeds resentment and hatred among the poor, resulting in the breakdown of social peace and security.

Poverty Rate

There is no doubt that poverty is one of the major global challenges, affecting the majority of countries with alarming and distressing realities. According to a report by FINCA, more than one billion people worldwide live on \$2.50 USD or less per day, including 280 million people who live in extreme poverty, defined as surviving on less than \$1.25 USD per day. The report emphasizes that seventy-five percent of the world's poor reside in rural areas, most of whom depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. It also notes that between sixty to eighty percent of income in developing countries is spent on food. Furthermore, over 800 million people globally suffer from insufficient food intake, and more than one million children die annually due to poverty and malnutrition. Additionally, over forty million children worldwide live without adequate shelter, more than 750 million people lack access to clean water, and approximately 1.7 billion people do not have bank accounts or access to basic financial services.

In 2020, the number of people living in poverty increased by an estimated 119 to 124 million, sixty percent of whom reside in South Asia. Reports further indicate that global poverty rates rose from 8.4% to 9.5% in 2020, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the World Bank, the pandemic caused an increase of roughly 97 million people living in poverty in 2020, with projections suggesting that this number could rise to between 143 and 163 million in 2021.

The change of government and ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan have significantly exacerbated poverty levels in the country. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), 47.3% of Afghanistan's population lived below the poverty line in 2020, with 34.3% of the working population earning less than \$1.90 USD

per day.(World Bank, 2015). Government surveys conducted during 2016-2017 on living conditions reported that over 54% of the population lived below the national poverty line, set at 2064 Afghanis per person per month—equivalent to approximately \$31 USD at that time (or about \$4 USD in 2021). The data indicates a continuing upward trend in poverty rates within Afghanistan.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 97% of Afghanistan's population is at risk of falling into poverty by mid-2022 due to drought, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the recent political transition marked by the fall of Ashraf Ghani's government and the emergence of the Taliban administration. UNDP official Kanni Wignaraja stated that Afghanistan is on a path toward rapid and catastrophic deterioration in the lives of its most vulnerable populations. The report estimates that the poverty rate in Afghanistan in 2021 stands at 72%.

Material needs are an undeniable reality of human life, and Islam has consistently emphasized the importance of meeting these needs through legitimate and ethical means. Islam encourages individuals to engage in productive work and lawful income generation. While some erroneously believe that Islam glorifies poverty and commands Muslims to remain poor, the truth is that Islam considers poverty a cause of corruption and equates it with disbelief. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) sought refuge from poverty and urged his followers to earn wealth through permissible and ethical avenues. Moreover, Islam provides diverse methods and strategies to combat poverty and reduce its prevalence, while actively fighting economic and financial corruption such as bribery, embezzlement, and usurpation.

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