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Reflecting On the Political Economy
Trajectory Of The Muslim World:

The need for substantive morality beyond Maslaha as a legitimacy tool



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ISLAM AS A SOCIAL FORCE IN SHAPING NEW MORALITIES

Post-colonial period had brought about existential changes in the Muslim world with prominent developments that marked the emergence of nation states either as revolutionary or traditional-kinship societies. Regardless of their political orientation and the place of religion in their mind, they were staunchly obsessed with the 'performing' economy as signified with the term of 'contemporarisation' of their societies to get rid of inferiority complex and accomplish socioeconomic development. In their conceptualisation of development, the elite of the newly emerging states had ignored the social formation of the societies in which they had become dis-embedded ruler, as they were obsessed with Western models of developmentalism. This approach necessarily forced them to socially engineer their societies, in most cases with force, by using different tools of legitimacy, among which included 'Islamic legitimisation' in the traditional societies. However, regardless of being revolutionary or traditional kinship societies, the elite's attempt did not produce any substantial socio-economic and political improvement in

developing their societies with the Western social formation that they had taken on board by dismissing the organic social formation, which came into existence with the shaping and formative nature of Islam over the centuries as a social force or social dynamic as well as being a religion.

Islam as a social force and political economy framework enables Muslim societies to develop and function therein, despite the fact that in the later centuries socio-political impact and functioning of Islamic system understanding faced stagnation. While by the beginning of the 20th century the Muslim world was in disarray in the main centres, the periphery still managed to function in different forms under the rubric of Islamic social formation.

Since social formation refers to the actual history of a particular society, every articulation of functioning, including economy, legal system, ownership, dispute resolution and local administration. Importantly Islamic political economy defines a particular production-consumption and distribution system -- or modes of production -- through its social formation by essentialising a moral economy perspective in the sense that economic and financing activities were also embedded in social formation and real economic activities. In addition, non-economic factors also determined the production-consumption and distributive activities in the Muslim societies. Therefore past societies and their function are considered to be 'moral economies' due to such consequential nature rather than because they were shaped by Islam as a religion. In other words, they were dominated as moral societies,

for their outcomes fit into Islamic expectations, as well as their forms defined by Islamic fiqh.

In nation building process in the modern state era, the new elite dismissed that each society or civilisation is a product of a particular ontological articulation resulting into a particular social formation. This gave rise to social, economic and political tensions in the Muslim world which has paved the way for the emergence of new ruling elite since 1970s mainly coming from the peripheries of their respective countries. As a counter hegemonic force, these new elite aimed at correcting the failure in their societies by essentialising Islam as a social force in shaping new moralities. As the main source of failure had been attributed to 'moral decadency' of the existing ruling elite; and therefore they mobilised societies, with various degrees of Islam from conservatism to radicalism. In their opposition to what the political economy in their respective society should be, they were articulate and therefore they managed to gain support in the public sphere through the electoral politics in the post-revolutionary states. Islamic social movements, as

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counter-hegemonic power bases, aimed at rescuing land, labour and capital through morality based identity search in constructing a new paradigm.

THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIC ECONOMICS

Amid such a political economy, Islamic economics movement emerged in 1960s, with the objective of developing a systemic response to the failure of both economic and political economy structure in the Muslim world. Particular emphasis was placed on 'human centred developmentalism', which aimed at up-holding social welfare of their societies and well being of individuals in their society, by developing functioning and





capable individuals.

However this new counter elite, in moving from the periphery to the centre, has gradually merged into the 'unbearable attractiveness of the centre' after coming into power. Their promises of a more moralistic paradigm by rescuing land, labour and capital has gradually disappeared, which in turn resulted in hybridism and in some cases mirroring the existing paradigm. In this, power overwhelmed their identity politics; and they surrendered to the existing system and political economies by withering away of their Islamic imaginations in substance but keeping them in symbolic forms. In this, Islam used as a legitimacy source through fiqh or form based approach by essentialising 'maslahah' or 'public interest', while the moral foundation of their approach, calling for substance oriented change and reform, has been pushed out of the agenda. Therefore, the Muslim societies have plunged into further economic and political economy difficulties with the increasing poverty, unequal distribution of wealth and income, corruption, curbed economic-social-and-political rights, civil-religious-and-ethnic tensions and unrest, and culture of violence – but this time with maslahah based Islamic legitimisation.

The same trajectory is observed in the unprecedented success of Islamic finance and banking. These have been turned into a new field of capitalist enlargement by bringing capitalist desires into the Islamic economic paradigm, through the justification process of maslahah in fiqh approach, which eventually leads to giving up the moral imagination of creating an Islamic moral economy order. Hence, Islamic finance has been expressing itself within the neo-classical form through the facilitatory role of fiqh by only becoming the hybrid products of the existing system rather than by developing a counter hegemonic expression of Islamic moral economy. In other words, Islamic finance has also surrendered to the powerful existing hegemony with its Islamic touch by giving up its moral or substance oriented promises. Thus, the new elite in politics, political economy and economy-finance areas could not substantiate their position of being counter hegemonic in creating a historical bloc, and hence in bringing about an essential change to re-formulate. Instead their policies, as observed in Islamic finance, has Islamised the existing structures, such as the case with the so-called Islamic capitalism.

In the twist of such

developments, as we have recently observed, the so-called counter hegemonic new elite since the beginning of the new century has not been able to correct the failures observed in the Muslim societies as they promised while in opposition, and the Muslim societies have plunged into new counter violence, economic-social-and political tensions. In this, such a maslahah and fiqh based approach beyond 'substantive morality of Islam' developed by the new elite has played an existential role. The functionalist approach that they developed towards Islam and political economy of democracy by legitimating their fictitious power, offered by the centre of their respective political economies, has been important. In other words, rather than changing the centre of their respective countries with the values they promised while in opposition, they have been toxicated like their predecessors were, by the power-base at the centre. Therefore they adopted the roles of the existing hegemonic centre by giving up their counterhegemonic promises. Hence in their promise of being embedded elite they converged to the centre, resulting into new dis-embeddedness in form and identity.

THE FICTITIOUS ISLAMIC BEHAVIOUR OF THE NEW ELITE

In post revolutionary societies the new elite came into power mostly through democracy, but they understand democracy only through their functional perspective of institutional democracy by ignoring that the consequences of such democracy has to be 'democratic' as well beyond 'winning elections'. In the tribal-traditional societies, usurping of power through Islamic or kinship based political economy based on the distribution rent in the society is no longer politically and economically sustainable, and therefore they have to undergo essential reform to 'enable' their societies so that the Islamic imagination of 'functioning individuals can emerge'.

Change, reform and development can only happen in responding to 'developing human centred paradigm' as Islamic moral economy calls for, if counter hegemony aims to be successful rather than Islamically substantiating the existing structures. Therefore they have perpetuated the social-economic-and political problems of the society through an Islamic twist. As the fictitious Islamic behaviour of the new elite in Muslim societies have so far demonstrated, it seems



that the entire promise has been capturing the power base of the centre, as we have witnessed gradually similar arrogant attitudes and putting a distance between themselves and public has become the new norms of the elite despite their promises whereby similar political economy problems have been produced.

Thus, if the so-called counter hegemony aims for changing their societies, it is essential that they must revise their actions and policies in essentialising human well-being as maqasid al-Shari'ah (objectives of Shari'ah), as it once was in their imagination of 1960s and 1970s' identity politics. Otherwise, the new elite being 'moralist in the opposition' but 'neo-liberal' in the power will only perpetuate the problems, and will sustain the 'culture of violence' in the Muslim world. In the same way, for Islamic finance to have positive impact beyond financialisation in the Muslim world, it has to go back to the basics and essentialise Islamic moral economy's call for 'human-centred-developmentalism'.

THE QUEST FOR AN ISLAMIC MORAL ECONOMY

In this, the new elite has to realise the ontological necessity of rights and freedoms in their fullest form as Islamic morality is beyond the suggested hudud system (fiqhi limits by focusing on penalty codes and behavioural norms), as we observe in the world today; and therefore, functionalist approach to Islam as well as democracy has to be replaced with Islamic and democratic consequence based

approach. Maslahah should be given up in Islamic legitimatisation, and substantive morality based approach in the sense of 'if the thief is the daughter of Prophet, she should be punished in the same way as any other person in the society' has to constitute the moral frame in the societies; therefore, intention based approach has to be harmonized and strengthen with consequentialist approach, as maqasid al-Shari'ah suggests.' The new ruling elite has to understand the essential nature of the 'centre' in their respective societies, so that their moral and identity politics based promises in rescuing land-labour and capital can be possible rather than surrendering themselves to the centre's power base through neo-liberal policies. Structural changes in policy making must be taken up as essential policy option so that the future of the Muslim societies should be developed with substantive morality beyond neo-liberal form, in the sense that poverty in the Muslim societies cannot be alleviated by the generosity of the new capitalist class created by the new elite, which as a policy they opposed while in opposition. Therefore, modes of production in the Muslim societies must be revised to produce a new structure, which has to be based on Islamic moral economy. Thus, 'Islamic' in public policy, economics and politics cannot be relegated to fictitious understanding of legitimacy through maslahah that creates 'Islamically oriented individual doing 'halal neo-liberalism'', but it is essential to reform through

expanded maqasid al-Shari'ah to produce developmentalism in its fullest. Only then the new elite whether in politics, administration or in civil society and social movements in post-revolutionary as well as tribal societies and in the newly revolutionised societies can be promoters of development and change, otherwise, with the existing policies and structures, whatever Islamic in the name, the suffering in the Muslims societies will inevitably continue.

It is also important also to state that 'development of individual' in the counter hegemonic circles, including Islamic social movements, proved to be problematic. As the whole objective in developing the new elite should have been to bring about change to better conditions in the Muslim societies as the identity politics since 1970s suggests. However, the results in the Muslim societies show that these individuals somehow obsessed with modernism, and therefore as the new elite they want to change the society through their social engineering which they opposed while in opposition. It seems that they are under fictitious dreams that that if they do the same

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things with Islamic legitimisation, the result will be acceptable. Such a falsified understanding has been legitimised through maslahah, which does not have any substantive morality base. In this approach, they consider the resources of the countries in which they lead as their promised rights and therefore, in the new resource allocation, they have been behaving in the same way as they predecessors did: it is their rights and decision, and they are the right one. This time such behavioural norms have been justified through maslahah resulting in the same dis-embeddedness with Islamic justification making it even worse. Therefore, the strategies of such circles have to be reformed so that they can internalise the fact that

the issue is not usurping power, but using power to realise promises. In other words, power is only instrument and is not the end in itself, but the end should be human well-being and social welfare, while they have to realise that power is the instrument of such a policy, after all they are supposed to be 'witness onto mankind' within Islamic morality.

HOPE FOR A NEW APPROACH TO ECONOMICS

In conclusion, it is time for hope and healing. Hope that 'a moral economy' approach can prevail in the heart and mind of the new ruling elite so that they can essentialise human development in its fullest and they can realise their responsibilities in creating a historical bloc as a counter hegemony for 'social good and justice'. Hope that the new elite in every level -- including in the Islamic social movements -- can understand that 'usurping power' is not their objective. Instead their objective must be to essentialise substantive morality and develop structures so that human development can be achieved. Hope that the new elite can remember the real meaning of embeddedness in representing the population within the norms of their own societies, in line with the substantive morality based social formation from which they have emerged. Hope that they must learn that any form of resource mis-allocation through patronage is wrong, even if it is for Islamic objectives and therefore maslahah cannot justify their patronage, corruption, infringement of human rights and freedom. There must be healing in the sense that the increased nature of 'the socio-economic-political' suffering in the Muslim world, also at the hand of the counter hegemonic power, can be reversed so that 'Islamic' morality can be achieved morally and substantively regardless of the legitimacy they may have through maslahah. Only then alienation of the new Muslim elite from their society, and the real impact of their policies through a new social formation and modes of production, can make a significant impact on the lives of the people beyond expanding their power bases. After all the objective must be developed for a 'human-centred developmentalism' through universally defined terms and conditions with the objective of essentialising individual falah, or salvation, through embedding ihsan or social beneficence and adalah or social justice. The legitimacy of power can only then be possible, not for the sake of power.