SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH VIEW OF SAID NURSI: THE CHALLENGE OF THE WEST

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Abstract

Islamic Economics is not totally against invisible forces of demand and supply and investments in the market economy. Even the concept of the profit motive is acceptable to a certain extent. Private ownership is not entirely denied. Islamic economy is the ethical alternative to pure capitalism. This paper highlights the essential difference between capitalist and Islamic economy and the way forward for sustainable development in a Muslim society as viewed by Said Nursi in explaining the concept of economic development. A large amount of literature through the view of Said Nursi on various aspects of economics and finance has clearly explained that Islam avoid resorting to monopoly or usury would have precluded the injustice to which workmen are subjected under a capitalist economic system where they are exploited and left to suffer humiliation and poverty. The ruler in the Islamic society shall not remain helplessly towards the problem of the amassing of national resources in the hands of a few individuals while the majority is suffering from hunger, deprivation. The study highlighted that Said Nursi provides an important light through teaching of Quran and Sunnah on sustainable growth and development before it is available in the theories by the leading expert from the west. Thus, the Muslim Umma need to study in deep the contribution of scholars like Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in various aspects of life, not only in economics. It is only through this effort that Muslim society will act as fast as possible so as not to wait for a theory to be formulated from the West.

Keywords: Islamic Economics, Capitalism, Justice, Usury, Sustainable Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1876-1960). His biography spanned the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, in which it collapsed after the First World War. Nursi is known for several educative measures in protecting the teaching of Islam in various aspects of life. He studies and mastered physical, mathematical sciences, and philosophy, for he believed that it was through that Islamic theology could be renewed and successfully the attacks to which the Quran and Islam were then subject. “I shall prove and show the world that the Quran is an undying, inextinguishable Sun!” He vowed. Nursi was Among Muslim Ulama of the twentieth century who contributed to the revival of Islam after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. Nursi contributed greatly to motivating the development of the modern Islamic economics and Islamic finance.

Before highlighting Nursi’s thought on sustainable economic development, the clarification, technical meanings of some concepts regarding economic growth and development would be very helpful.
2. CONCEPT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development is a process of a stable increase in economy’s real national income as well as per capita income over a long period of time. The improvement of people general welfare over a long period and embody changes in dynamic elements. Here it includes positive changes in the rate of capital formation, resource supplies, in technology, skills, and efficiency, in demographic composition, and institutional and organisational set-up. The respective changes in the structure of demand for goods and service, in the level and pattern of income distribution, in consumption habits and living standards, in size and composition of the population and in the aspect of social relationships and religious dogmas, ideas and institutions are also regarded as a composition of economic development. Thus, “economic development is a channel consisting of a long term links of interrelated changes in fundamental factors of supply and also in the structure of demand, resulting to a rise in the net national income of a country in the long run.”

3. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Islam own approaches in achieving Sustainable Development are basically comprised two tasks. First, implementation of an Islamic economic system and second the revitalisation of the traditional resource management institutions of Islam. Special attention to human beings is paramount important in Islam’s vision of sustainable development Sustainable Development is a new concept of development that consider the integration of environmental conservation in achieving growth and development. Previously, the concept of development was for long regarded synonymous with economic growth and had been measured by gross national income.

The concept of development is more than that of economic growth because in development increase of quality of life most considers while growth, accommodate the only increase of the GDP or economy (Schidheiny 1992, 2). Sustainable Development means quality enhancement of human and other spheres through satisfying their basic needs Munn (1989). It shows that the concept of sustainable development has a more comprehensive meaning than economic growth.

Beder (1993, 3) opinioned that the concept of needs is relative, which implies a society’s concept of need is built upon their culture and values, and the concept of changes in time. Thus, something a basic need of one society is probably not so considered by another society. Nevertheless, values and culture can determine the concept of needs and inevitably contribute to explaining Sustainable Development. The Quran verses highlight the concepts of sustainable growth are as follows:

i. (Quran 2:11) stated that “Make not mischief on the earth.”
ii. (Quran 30:41) stated that “Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned, that (God) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from evil).”
iii. (Quran 21:30) stated that “And We created from water every living thing.”
iv. (Quran 6:38) Stated that “There is not a moving creature on earth, or a bird that flies with its wings, but they are communities like you (humans). We have neglected nothing in the Book; then unto their Lord they shall (all) be gathered.”
v. (Qur'an 30:30) stated that Devote thyself single-mindedly to the Faith, and thus follow the nature designed by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah.

vi. (Qur'an 13:2-3) show that Allah creates man and also creates planet and it is the responsibility of man to protect and look after it. This indicates that although human being is a superior creature to other creation that surround him, he is responsible for almost all the damage that could affect his environment. Man is not free to destroy the earth because he is a creature and trustees or viceregents. Therefore From this verse one can learn that it is part of 'Ibada’ and compulsory duty of man to take care for the nature at least not to destroy it. It is, in fact, every Muslim responsibility to God to preserve natural resources on the Earth

4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI’S THOUGHT

During Nursi time, Ottoman society and particularly the Islamic World, in general, were living through their most challenging and depressed period. Western world at that time was progressing with giant leaps in various disciplines such as science, technology, art, literature and philosophy for a long period, the age-long Ottoman society was in a state of collapse (Amer 2000). Despite this, Nursi was not without hope for the future of the Islamic Society. With the democratization process, firstly Ottoman society, other Islamic societies following and even the whole Asian region would enter an economic development process and would increase their prosperity (Bayrak 2011). Because, according to Nursi, all the necessary dynamics for economic development were eminently present in the Ottoman society. ( Abu-Rabi et al. 2003)

One can examine Nursi’s dynamics of economic development under three headings; physical and geographical dynamics, the sociological dynamics, and psychological dynamics. According to Nursi, population density, geographic conditions and are important factors consider for development. Thus the availability of the rivers and the minerals, especially the flatness of land in Northern Europe were among the factors that promote development in the Western Europe.

“Yes, the idea of artistic works (industrialization thought), tendency of learning come out of multiplicity (the population density). Because of the narrowness of Europe, seas and rivers providing natural transport facilities circulating within them, just as familiarity results trade, cooperation results the participation of work, contact also promotes accumulation of ideas and competition promotes the contest. Iron mines, which are the foundation of much industry, existed in plenty and iron gave to their civilization a weapon of power with which to extort and loot all the wreccages of civilizations in the world, outweighing and breaking the balance of scale on the ground.” (Nursi, 2010, 66).

Needs, according to said Nursi is an important and necessary factor that promote economic growth. As he pointed out need is the father of the civilization as well as the founder of advancement (Nursi 2006, 51). The central point that Nursi emphasized is that human effort to acquire or put in place to satisfy human need promote the ability of an economy to grow. Nursi clearly highlight the need is a force
that lead to establishment of industries and civilization and thus, an economy achieves industrial development through human needs. According to him, need continuously increases, primarily with elements like fashion and custom. Expanding needs encourage production and the increase and diversification of production again increase need, through advertisement, custom, and fashion. Thus, the diversification of production again increases the need, which increases production and increases expansion and more profitable investments. Another dynamic of economic development that Nursi handles is the poverty that ‘bends our waist’. According to Nursi, poverty “is a force that (by any power) cannot be silenced and be broken”. (Nursi 2010, 34)

5. WESTERN CAPITALISM: NURSI VIEWS

To free Muslims from being dependent on others, Said Nursi’s notion of creating a balance between the society’s needs and the availability of its resources provide a meaningful solution to the problems facing Muslims. His call for greater cooperation among Muslims to exploit and share existing resources in a more equitable way applies to the current state of economic affairs in the Muslim world. From Nursi’s point of view, cooperation in the fields of economics and production is an important criterion for generating wealth. This implies that the formation of monopolies may not be suitable because of their mismanagement of resources and maldistribution of income. He also supports the division of labor and specialization in production, which he considers a time-saving method in generating wealth. He states that:

"if this principle of shared property is applied to works pertaining to the Hereafter, it accumulates vast benefits that produce no loss. For it means that all the property passes to the hands of each partner. For example, there are four or five men. With the idea of sharing, one of them brings paraffin, another a wick, another the lamp, another the mantle, and the fifth matches; they assemble the lamp and light it. Each of them becomes the owner of a complete lamp. If each of these partners has a full-length mirror on a wall, he will be reflected in it together with the lamp and room, without deficiency or being split up." (Nursi 1995, 197).

In his view, Western civilization handles the problem of poverty among Muslims by encouraging the consumption of a large number of commodities. For Nursi, survival requires the consumption of a limited number of products beyond which he considers as excessive consumption. Thus, Western patterns of consumption exhibit a demand for a large number of commodities, which keeps man always in need. Nursi regards the existence of poverty among Muslims, despite their rich resources, as being due to the influence of Western patterns of consumption.

“Do you suppose this nation’s poverty is the result of a sort of religious asceticism or of laziness arising from abandoning the world? You are wrong to suppose that. Do you not see that the nations dominated by Europe like China, and the Brahmans and Zoroastrians of India, and the blacks of Africa are poorer than we are? Moreover, do you not see that nothing apart from the most basic subsistence is left in the hands of the Muslims? The rest is either stolen or seized by the European infidel tyrants or the dissemblers of Asia.” (Zaim 1997, 176)
6. ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Similarly, in Nursi ideas there were love of nature. He showed great interest and curiosity from his childhood where studied mountains, plateau, plains, spring, rivers, including living creature around then (Özdemir 1998). Nursi shared a food brought to him with his people called the Republican and rebuke his student for killing a lizard by asking him: did you create it? Bediuzzaman asked the following important questions that are within the Quranic context and sought the answers:

i. What is the meaning of the universe?
ii. Where did the universe and all it comprises of come from, and where is it going?
iii. What is the source of the order, harmony, beauty and perfection in the universe?
iv. What is a man?
v. What are the man's duties and his responsibilities?

The followings are his answer to the above questions which were available in his earlier works:

“When mankind, like a successive caravan and procession, departs from the valleys of the past and its lands, travels in the deserts of existence and life and goes towards the heights of the future, facing towards its gardens, events shake it and creation turns its face towards it. It is as though the government of creation sends natural science to interrogate and question mankind, saying: O men! Where are you from? Where are you going? What are you doing? Who is your ruler? Moreover, who is your spokesman?” (Nursî 1995, 12)

Said Nursi lays greater stress on the metaphysical dimension of the universe than on anything else, and it forms the basis of his world-view. The essence of this world-view is that the universe and everything in it are created by God. “the Divine Names constitute the true reality of things while the essences of things are only shadows of that reality (Bediuzzaman 1994, 179).

While expounding verse 18 of Surah al-Hajj, he says this: “The All-Wise Qur’an states clearly that everything, from the heavens to the earth, from the stars to flies, from angels to fishes, and from planets to particles, prostrates, worships, praises and glorifies Almighty God. However, their worship varies according to their capacities and the Divine Names that they manifest; it is all different (Bediuzzaman 1994, 351-352, 361). He, thus, explains the existence of the universe and nature as above. Then stating that the sole purpose of the existence of things is not man as asserted by the anthropocentric view (Özdemir 1998).

Similarly, the field of Islamic economics needs to regard the environmental concern by adopting some of Nursi teaching concerning the Quranic guidelines concerning the environment Özdemir (1998). Also, “The Great Stamp of Divine Mercifulness, which is manifest through the mutual resemblance and proportion, order, harmony, favour, and compassion in the disposal, raising and administration of plants and animals on the face of the earth.” (Bediuzzaman1995, 218-219).

7. CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION IN ECONOMICS

Nursi discusses the issues on frugality in line with the literature on the modern concept of sustainable development moving toward balancing human needs against
the environment. Recent recommendations by international organizations, including the United Nations and the World Bank point to similar solutions to the problems of development as Nursi, projected them (Amer 2000). These recent studies emphasised on indigenous development, knowledge for development and rethinking development so as to encourage self-sufficiency hence the dependency can be reduced. Nursi had already taught this issues demanding that Muslims must strive towards self-sufficiency through controlling consumption and reducing wasteful of resources at their disposal.

Nursi believed that: "Greed destroys sincerity and damages actions in regard to the Hereafter." Moreover, as a result, Western accomplishments in the economic sphere have been linked by the unequal distribution of income, non-incentives in regards to work and injustices.

He put it that: "Excess of wastefulness lead to lack of contentment. And lack of contentment destroys enthusiasm for work; it causes laziness, open the door to complaining about life, and makes the dissatisfied person complain continuously. Also, it destroys sincerity, and opens the door to hypocrisy. And it destroys self-respect, and points the way to begging." (Bediuzzaman 1995, 218-219).

As the Quran explains "They ask thee as to what is allowed them. Say: The good things are allowed to you." (Quran 5: 4). "So eat of what God has given you, lawful and good things." (Quran 16: 114). Amongst other things that are forbidden in Islam is a waste and exorbitant consumption. "O ye who believe, forbid not the good things which God has made lawful for you and exceed not the limits." (Quran 5: 90)

Nursi believes that the deflation of our resources caused by man is as a result of man effort to violate God’s rules. For instance, divine justice constitutes the economic survival of man by way of frugality. As Nursi points out: "is both a sort of thanks, and shows respect towards the Divine mercy manifested in the bounties, and most definitely is the cause of plenty. So too, like abstinence, it is health giving for the body, and, since it saves a person from the degradation of what is in effect begging, is a cause of self-respect. It is also a powerful means of experiencing the pleasure to be found in bounties, and tasting that pleasure in bounties, which apparently afford no pleasure. As for wastefulness, since it is opposed to these instances of wisdom, it has grave consequences."

Nursi argues that waste means on man's part and could lead to imbalances in the market. Those who waste by spending too much may have to go through illegal means to earn money, causing consumption to increase and production to decline. Imbalance can also cause by the government owing to its money lending policies. By lending more money to spend on consumption, implies that less will be left in the treasury for improving the productivity of the economy. The result of such imbalance is higher prices and eventual increase in the number of poor people. Nursi believes that the economic problem and the spread of poverty are due to the misuse of economic resources and excessive consumption. In consequence of this, the productivity of workers declines and the government's management of the economy deteriorates. For Nursi, the solution to promote progress lies in man satisfaction and his ability to practice frugality. In an Islamic economy, the behavior of the Islamic man is to ensure the proper use of resources by avoiding waste and fulfilling the divine obligations. Furthermore, Nursi maintains that people must earn their living through hard work and not to live on the support of others including the government.
CONCLUSION
The fundamental problems that affect our Muslim Umma were a lack of confidence on what Muslim scholars contribute through teaching of the Quran and Sunnah. This may be as a result of the giant progress of the west in terms of the economic aspect of life. For instance, the issue of economic development came from the west in the 1960s, but it was explained in detail by Said Nursi from 1890s. Through Quranic teaching, Nursi explains the concept of sustainable economic growth. The study highlighted that the Quran and Sunnah provide an important light on sustainable growth and development than is presently available in the theories by the leading expert from the west. Thus, the Muslim Ummah need to study in deep the contribution of scholars like Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in various aspects of life, not only economics perspective but in another aspect of life. It is only through this that we will act as quickly as possible so as not to wait for a theory to be formulated from the West.

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