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Abstract

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Keywords: Socialism, Capitalism, Islamic Socialism, Communism

Authors:

Nihat Farid: (Corresponding Author)

Associate Professor, Government College for Women, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

(Email: cheenapk@yahoo.com)

Tanveer Anjum: Professor, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Aisha Farid: Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

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Title

Islamic Socialism and Communist Socialism: A Review of Comparative Analytical Studies

Authors:

Nighat Farid: (Corresponding Author)

Associate Professor, Government College for Women, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

(Email: cheenapk@yahoo.com)

Tanveer Anjum: Professor, Department of History, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Aisha Farid: Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government College Women University, Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract

The paper reviews studies that compare Communist Socialism and Islamic Socialism to explore how Islamic Socialism is a viable alternative to both Communism and Capitalism. It investigates the shortcomings of Capitalism, which caused the emergence of the idea of socialism. The paper also discusses the strong endorsement of Islamic Socialism by prominent Muslim scholars to inspire confidence in its legitimacy. The analysis reveals that Islamic revival movements that arose during the era of Western political domination emphasized values shared by Islam and the rest of the world and initiated the concept of Islamic Socialism. The principles of Socialism, such as the government's ownership of productive units and the establishment of social welfare programs, align with Islamic teachings on social justice. In Islam, Zakat serves as a form of funding for welfare programs and social services, reflecting the religion's compassion and concern for the poor.

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[Socialism](#), [Capitalism](#), [Islamic Socialism](#), [Communism](#)

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Introduction:

Background of the Study

Islamic Socialism is a response to reform reinterpreting Islam in recent times to challenge the disparity issues between the upper class or elite and the working class as a result of colonial powers' capitalistic policies. From this perspective, the policies formulated during the early Islamic era were considered a protest against abuse, corruption, and economic inequality. Modern Muslim reformers have aimed to demonstrate that the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah contain all the essential elements needed to address modern economic issues. This school of thought is particularly

associated with the teachings of Shah Wali Allah and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. The British colonial miseries in the Muslim World added fuel to the fire, and even after getting independence, they were left to experience some forms of Western capitalistic democracy, which resulted in economic disparity and social disorder. The problem convinced many Muslim scholars to think seriously about this system. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a bipolar world ruled by two economic ideologies- Capitalism and Socialism. Many Muslim scholars, inspired by the teachings of Shah Wali Allah and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, advocated the idea of Islamic



Socialism as they found that both Islam and Socialism aim at the social security of all citizens. They modified it and designated it Islamic Socialism, distinguishing it from other non-Islamic concepts. However, several scholars did not agree and raised questions about whether Socialism is permitted by or aligns with Islam, and if yes, how Islamic Socialism is different from the modern times basic concepts of Socialism. Despite these debates, the role of Islamic Socialism in addressing modern economic issues gives hope for its potential.

The current study aims to investigate the compatibility between modern Socialism and Islamic Socialism. This exploration aims to determine the extent of harmony or discord between these two economic ideologies.

Research Objectives

- To explore to what extent Socialism is compatible with Islam, a religion with a complete code of life.
- To elucidate the idea of Islamic socialism
- To identify the differences, if any, between communist Socialism and Islamic socialism.

Research Questions

- To what extent is the idea of Socialism compatible with Islam, a religion with a complete code of life?
- What is the idea of Islamic Socialism?
- What characteristics make Islamic Socialism different from Communist Socialism?

Significance and Scope of the Study

Islamic Socialism is an ignored subject because almost all the economies of Muslim countries are based on the liberal Western economic ideology of Capitalism. Socialism/Communism has been an anathema to traditional Muslim scholarship, and thus, only a handful of Muslim scholars have tried to reconcile Islam with Socialist economic policies. The present study is significant as it explores the concept of Islamic Socialism in the light of his thoughts and its relevance

for solving present-day economic problems. Thus, the study is significant as it provides valuable information for disciplines such as History, Economics, and Islamic Studies. The study can also be helpful in policy-making regarding economic issues.

Research Methodology

This study is qualitative. It uses historical documents to identify and elucidate the concepts of Islamic socialism and Communist Socialism and reviews earlier historical works to evaluate the level of compatibility between the two.

The present study is primarily interpretative and analytical, though it sometimes takes a descriptive form. It intends to analyze the subject's impact on modern-day economic matters; therefore, some insight from modern economic theories has also been employed.

Literature Review

There is much literature on understanding Socialism, the Islamic economic system, and its historical roots. The studies discuss Socialism from various perspectives, including Western thoughts and Islamic teachings. Some recent studies have even compared Islamic economics and the Western concepts of socialism and capitalism and provided some insight into their similarities and differences in modern-day perspectives. Ahmad et al. (2019) opined that Islamic economics is based on a thorough understanding of human needs and caters to benefit both self and society through the justified use of abundant resources. Zulkarnaen et al. (2024), in their review of literature on a comparison drawn between Islamic economics and Pancasila democratic economics, concluded that Islamic economics is against injustice, exploitation, and imbalance caused by capitalist and socialist economics. Uddin (2023) studied the Islamic Socialistic policies in South Asia and highlighted how Islamic Socialism promotes ideas about God's close relationship with his creation and how understanding the nature of this relationship leads to new valuable socialist interpretations. These and many other latest works surround the Islamic doctrines about economy and socialism as interpreted by the earlier Muslim

scholars. Therefore, the major focus of this research is the earlier Muslim scholars' contributions towards the interpretation of Islamic economics and the concept of welfare society and their comparison with capitalism and the Western concept of socialism.

Shaikh Mahmud Ahmad is an important name in this regard. In *Economics of Islam (A Comparative Study)* (1968), he compares modern economic ideologies with the Islamic economic system. He tries to explain the role of zakat and interest-free banking within the strictly limited spheres surrounded by capitalistic sabotage and 'unsocial Socialism'.

Mirza Muhammad Hussain's *Islam Versus Socialism* (1970) critiques the idea of Socialism in Pakistan. A society that disregards poverty and turns a deaf ear to the demand for social justice sits on the thin crust of a laboring volcano. Hussain (1970) examines that the impact of sharp economic disparities and the violent social contrasts was so deep that even the conservative Muslim scholars turned to the new ideology of Socialism, and they began to proclaim their allegiance to Islam and emphasized that the Manifestoes of Socialism are a replica of the principles of Islamic social justice. Hussain finds materialism as frosted sentiments that cannot inspire mercy and pity for the downs and outs. It is only the God-oriented religion of Islam that sways the minds that the rich shower their possessions on the poor classes. For him, the idea of Islamic social equity is much better than any reactionary ideology.

Afzalur Rahman, in his four-volume work titled *Economic Doctrines of Islam* (1974, 1975, 1976, and 1979), explains not only the primary principles of the economic system of Islam but also discusses the main factors of production and their role in the system in four volumes. His work helps us understand the modern theories of interest and the Islamic stance on the issue of prohibition of interest. It analyzes the zakat system and deals with the monetary system, interest-free banking, insurance, and its place in the Islamic economic system.

Hamid Enayat, (2001) has attempted to survey Islam's compatibility with Western ideas of nationalism, democracy, and Socialism in *Modern Islamic Political Thoughts* (1982). The problem of

divided loyalties to Islam and ethnic and linguistic particularities is a serious one for the Muslim World. Among Arabs, a special pride of Arabism is to be found. Iranian or Persian nationalism has historically found its expression in the Shia creed. However, he finds a greater affinity between Islam and Socialism since both aim at social justice. Socialist ideas can be accommodated within the Islamic socio-economic spirit if the atheistic and Euro-centric aspects of modern Socialism are discarded.

Maulana Muhammad Ali argues in *The Religion of Islam* (1980) that Islam opposes Bolshevism, which does not give individual property rights, and is socialistic because it asserts an almost equal distribution of wealth.

Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi's works *Maashiyat-e Islam* (1981), *Capitalism Socialism and Islam* (1995), and *Islamic Way of Life* (1996) provide a treasure of information about the principles of Islamic economics and the basic differences among these three ideologies. *Maashiyat-e Islam* helps us understand the philosophy of economics according to Islam and guides us in solving modern economic problems.

M. Raihan Sharif's *Guideline to Islamic Economics: Nature, Concepts, and Principles* (1996) greatly contributes to understanding the Islamic concept of Socialism. The study provides some guidelines for understanding Islamic economics to solve the problems resulting from industrial and scientific development. Capitalism and Socialism made the situation very complex, especially for Muslim countries, which had to make policies based on Islamic economic doctrine in a world where the powerful Western nations are ruling as global economic benefactors. Sharif elaborates on Islamic concepts and principles that can be applied in such economic spheres.

Sami A. Hanna, an Egyptian scholar, also offers valuable information on the development of Islamic Socialism in his two articles, "Al Takaful Al-Ijtimai and Islamic Socialism" (1969) and "Al-Afghani: A Pioneer of Islamic Socialism" (2007). He, along with George H. Gardner, tries to find out the historical background of Arab Socialism in their work *Arab Socialism: A Documentary Survey* (1969). Some parts

of the book are dedicated to Dr. Mustafa al-Siba-i and his work, *Ishtirakiyyat al-Islam*, or *The Socialism of Islam*. Siba-i describes Islamic laws and regulations as Islamic Socialism because he believes they aim to organize ownership and promote social solidarity. Islamic Socialism acknowledges five natural rights and emphasizes legislating for social equality and addressing issues such as poverty, sickness, ignorance, fear, and degradation. In Islamic Socialism, social solidarity is seen as more comprehensive than other socialist systems and is considered the best way to ensure an individual's dignity and happiness.

Analysis:

Socialism

Socialism is not simple to define; political scholars and social scientists do not agree on any single definition of socialism. Therefore, scholars offer a variety of definitions. These definitions cover the concept from various angles: an ideology promoting ownership rights of the public, economic and political policies for implementation of the right for ownership, a set of beliefs asserting a fair socio-economic system, and an economic organization for social welfare. Socialism, according to Odajnyk (1987), is an ideology that promotes the right of the common public to own or control property or any other important means of production. It emphasizes a fairer and more efficient distribution of social goods and better economic planning than capitalism. Socialism, thus, seems to be more concerned about economics. However, its effects extend to moral, social, and political spheres (146).¹ In Schneck's opinion (in *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 2001), Socialism refers to economic and political policies, decisions, and their implementation that ensure public ownership of all productive property, including land, factories, and any other property that is used goods production and services. The famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1787) considers Socialism a broad category of beliefs or political movements that idealize a socio-economic system in which wealth and property distribution is subjected to social control. For him, socialism as a financial device is related to state or collective ownership of the manner of production. This may be

managed directly and implemented via popular collective means like workers' councils or indirectly and exercised via other means of the state. Marxist-socialist thinker Dickinson (1971) opines that Socialism is an economic organization of society in which, though the whole community owns the material means of production, the organs that represent and are responsible to the community operate these means according to a general economic plan. All community members are entitled to benefit from the results of such socialized planned production based on equal rights. Thus, the three basic goals of socialism are (1) The collective ownership of the production means by the state as well as distribution and trade; (2) economic planning; (3) total equality (economic as well as social).

However, different groups of socialists advocate different ways of achieving these goals. Some socialists favor the nationalization (the state ownership) of all businesses; others believe that the capital within a somewhat free market must be under the state's control. Nevertheless, there are the Social Democrats who prefer mixed economies with selective nationalization, where there is part-free and part-government control or ownership.

Another popular concept of Socialism offered by Karl Marx was scientific socialism. Karl Marx is recognized as the father of scientific socialism (Tayler, 1968). He made two important contributions in this regard. With his friend Frederick Engels, he wrote and promulgated the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. The manifesto was a call for the workers of the world to 'unite because they had nothing to lose but their chains' (Henderson, 1976, p. 133). The other significant work is Karl Marx's famous book *Das Kapital*, written in 1867, which is considered the Bible of scientific socialism and earned much public attention (Hoffman & Graham, 2010; Adler & Pouwels, 2011). However, Modern socialists have deviated from Marxist Socialism (Steger, 2006). In Europe today, socialists declare themselves Social Democrats since they believe that democracy is the hallmark of socialism, and their concept of socialism has nothing to do with any other forms of socialism, mainly Marxian socialism (Sargent, 1987). Socialism

assigns the government the responsibility of distribution and production. Social distribution lessens the distance between the rich and the poor and promotes equality, whereas capitalism intends to individualize wealth, which usually results in an unequal society and, thus, fails to provide equal opportunities to all. It does not favor the state's intervention and seeks to promote a free market. Nonetheless, despite these differences, both socialism and capitalism, in contrast to Marxism, promote the establishment of democratic offices to help people make social decisions for social and collective benefits. Therefore, the philosophical foundations of Marxism, based on the materialist interpretation of concepts like history, ethical relativism, and political totalitarianism, are lethal and self-destructive and thus given no place in Socialism.

According to contemporary scholars, socialism covers various human affairs, including political, social, and economic life. Berki (1975) States, 'Socialism is a mirror that reflects our political, economic and cultural life full of extremism, violence, resignation and escapism, fantasy and crime premises (20).' For Hacker (b.1946), Socialism is a 'system of government that tightly controls the national economy and provides wide-ranging social services to its people. Communism, often confused with socialism, is a more intense form of Marxism that encourages a one-party state governing with a state-run economy.'

Thus, the scope of socialism cannot be reduced. It involves society working for the productive equipment that it owns, whether through government departments, public utility corporations, national guilds, or cooperative societies, and the procedure for the distribution of the social product, whether according to service or needs, whether in separate shares to individuals or communal supplies and services.

Islamic Socialism

During the past two centuries, influenced by European socialist ideologies, some Muslim scholars have tried to present the Qur'anic vision of mutual obligations in society as a form of proto-socialism.

Their works attempted to distinguish Islamic Socialism from the other types of socialism and highlight the importance of public welfare in an Islamic society. Muhammad Ali (1990) states, 'Islam, thus, opposes Bolshevism because Bolshevism does not approve of individual's property rights. However, it, at the same time, has some socialist streaks in its beliefs as it seeks to ensure a more or less equal distribution of wealth (509).'

Some scholars have expressed the concept of socialism as a call for social justice (Nasr, 1987). Many Muslim scholars related it to the times of the Prophet (PBUH) and his successors. The Companion of the Prophet (PBUH) Hazrat Abu Dharr al-Ghafari (d.652) was the first person who felt the dangers of wealth accumulation in the hands of a few ruling the conquered areas during the reign of Caliph Uthman (r. 644-56) (Afghani in Ramay (ed.), 1970). He believed it was the state's responsibility to eliminate rather than reduce social differences since that could be detrimental to Muslim unity. He even branded them as non-Muslims who accumulated wealth (Barq in Ramay(ed.), 1970).

Socialism has been considered in the Muslim World since the twentieth century when independence movements against colonial capitalistic tyranny started. The rise of socialism, based on social equality through equal distribution of wealth by the state, led Muslim scholars to think it was compatible with Islam's social justice system.

Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838/9-1897), a renowned Muslim religious-political scholar, critically examined Western socialism, compared it with Islamic socialism and decided in favor of Islamic socialism (Hanna, 1969). As the first 'Neo-Traditionalist' (Keddie, 1983), He tried to restate Muslim traditions within the Qur'an and rejected unthinking traditionalism and blind imitation of the Christian West. He was born in Iran, but he spent a long period of his life in Afghanistan and Turkey (Algar, 1969). He was a pan-Islamist, so he claimed himself to be sometimes an Afghani and sometimes a Turk (Keddie, 1983, 19). His efforts to bring reforms in Islamic traditions on the patterns needed in modern times, such as human reason, political activism, and

military and political strength, made him popular all over the Muslim World (Razzaqi, 1979). With the publication of *Al-Radd ala l-dahriyin* (The Refutation of the Materialists) in 1881 (Jackson, 2006), he presented himself as the defender of Islam (Keddie, 1983). He started working for the political unification of the Muslim World. The main pillar of his thought was the idea of Divine Unity (Faruki, 1971).

Another important work by Afghani has been the publication of a newspaper. In 1884, Afghani and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) published the pan-Islamic Arabic newspaper *al-Urwat al-Wuthqa* (The Strongest Link). The newspaper criticized the British government for its policies in Egypt and promoted reformist and liberal attitudes (Jackson, 2006; Keddie, 1983). Afghani's pan-Islamism led to pan-Arabism, later developed by Gamal Abd al-Nasser (1918-1970) in political terms and the concept of the Muslim Brotherhood in ideological terms (Jackson, 2006).

Explaining the origin of Arab Socialism, in his article "Al-Afghani: A Pioneer of Islamic Socialism," Sami A. Hanna admitted that the origin of Arab socialism, labeled Islamic socialism or 'Ishtirakiyyat al-Islam,' goes back to the concepts of Jamal al-Din Afghani about socialism (Hanna, 2007; Moaddel & Tallatof, 2000). Afghani dismissed all the political theories of the West, including socialism, as incapable of satisfying human society's needs. He admitted that there was a touch of Islamic brotherhood (*Akhūwât*) as it recognized no distinction between color and race. However, the basis of unity in socialism is economic equality, which is not attractive to people who like the system based on religion and cultural affinities. He pointed out that his age was full of commercial and political rivalries. As long as human society remains divided in this manner, no country or people can follow the unreasonable principle of economic equality. On the other hand, Islam's concepts of unity, *Tāwhīd*, and belief in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) satisfied the physical, worldly, and spiritual aspects of human life (Moazzam, 1989).

Al-Afghani wrote an essay on Islamic socialism, which was, in fact, a reply to a question put to him by a Turkish scholar during his stay in Istanbul (1892-97) (Hanna, 2007). In this article, Al-Afghani criticized

Western Socialism for its hatred of unjust rulers and laws. The jealousy of the workers to the people, who had grown rich as a result of their hard work and struggle and who were living extravagantly and wastefully before their eyes, now results in abuses. Socialism, if is not rooted in any religious foundation and has no authority to stop and work for social welfare, will only cause chaos and eventually be a drastic failure. For Al-Afghani, Islamic socialism is the mainstream line of Islam, and it is also somehow related to the social character of the earliest nomad pagans, the first to practice. The most zealous promulgators of Socialism were the Caliphs, the Prophet's immediate companions. Afghani states:

'Islamic socialism guarantees the best effectiveness and efficiency. This is doable because the Qur'an, its holy scripture, contains many indicators of this very notion. The Fatiha (the first chapter of the Qur'an) teaches Muslims their first lesson that "God is the Lord of all the worlds," that there is only one Lord of mankind, and that He is an underling like the rest. He also knows this. The Qur'an commands the powerful, mightier, and conquerors to safeguard the rights of the weak and commands that those who cannot participate in holy war or jihad should be allowed to participate (of the spoil), (8: 41). It is based on the notion of sharing or *ishtirak*, as was the custom, for the mutual satisfaction of everyone including those who fought and also those who could not. After God and the Messenger, those belonging to the warriors were given priority as regards their kinship: those who took care of their children when they were away. After that came those who were not related, who was named "orphans". Sharing is then made available to even low-income people, such as the poor; sharing was created to enhance and engage the passengers further. It was a form of socialism that involved nothing better or more. The Qur'an criticizes those who collect wealth and praises those who selflessly help and feed the poor, even though they themselves may be destitute (Hanna, 2007, 27).'

Afghani considered Islamic Socialism reasonable and beneficial, as God the Great Legislator has made a balanced and effective social system. One important pillar of Islam is Zakat- Muslims are required to pay

zakat, a legal alms out of the capital, whatever form it is.

The call for Socialism was raised in the Arab Middle East for social and religious reforms. Michel Aflaq (1910–1989), a Syrian educator and the founder of the Arab Ba’th Party (Nasr, 1987) called Socialism a religion of life and the triumph of life (Choueiri, 2001). For him, the purpose of Socialism was not to speed up factory production but to release everyone’s deserving gifts and bring back the faith in human life.

The urge for Arab unity turned Socialism into Arab Nationalism to fight against European colonialism and eliminate class-based society. Khalid Muhammad Khalid (1920–1996), an Egyptian teacher, political and social reformer, and intellectual, wrote the book *From Here We Started* in 1950 (Hibbard, 2010). He favored the movement and considered Socialism the most likely way to create a social system that would lift the Egyptian masses out of the chaos of poverty, ignorance, disease, and dependence (Hanna & Gardner, 1969). Nasser, the Egyptian leader, later used the slogans of Arab Nationalism and Arab Socialism to extend his power over other Arab areas (Mahfouz in Donhue & Esposito (ed.), 1982).

The early twentieth century saw controversy over the state's right to nationalize private property. Modern nations consider it their right to nationalize private property for public welfare and socio-economic development. Almost all modern Muslim states followed such policies and used their religious supporters to promote Islamic approval of such policies despite religious opposition from some quarters. Gamal Abdel Nasser implemented his socialist stance in Egypt. Al-Azhar's Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltut (1893–1963) developed a thesis reconciling Islamic and Arab socialism (Nayang in Hashmi (ed.), 2002). Mustafa Saba'i (1915–1964), presented his Islamic concept of socialism in his book, *Istrikiyat al-Islam* (The Socialism of Islam). His main concern was to show that Islam was not at all alien to socialism because it emphasized the right to private property as it sanctioned the institution of inheritance and feudalism and allowed the rich to dispose of their wealth at will.

Hamid Enayat, in his book *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (1982), examines Sabai's views on Islamic socialism, which consists of four aspects: (1) natural rights for all people; (2) laws to ensure and regulate these rights; (3) Laws of social responsibility (al-Itakaf al-Sajal); and (4) to ensure or support the first three laws. Saba'i has argued, based on the Qur'anic teachings, that God is the real owner of everything and that He has released all His worldly possessions to the control of people. He concluded from the Qur'anic references that the material world has everything that human beings have if they strive for it with their willpower, intellect, and struggle. Moreover, all people are equally eligible to use the 'good things of the earth'. In Islam, a person is entitled to something only if he has honestly possessed it. And the most honest means of acquiring or owning anything is work. On the contrary, claiming ownership of anything/property through begging, injustice, deception, and loss is strictly prohibited. However, owning something is the ultimate end: just as it is to be honestly earned, its use and purpose must be honest and useful to both the individual and society. Therefore, Islam considers individual property as a social duty.

Hamid Enayat has highlighted the most interesting aspect of Siba'i's arguments on ownership, i.e., his justification for the nationalization of certain types of property. Siba'i enumerated many Islamic rules that mark nationalization as an important feature of Socialism. He referred to the Prophetic traditions in this regard. The most important is that “people own three things in common: water, grass and fire”; at another place, it adds salt, too. Siba'i argued that in the early Islamic era, all these things were essential for desert life; however, their listing should not be considered all-inclusive. In the modern context, water stands for the entire installation of water; fire refers to all kinds of power supplies like electricity and gas, and salt means all essential food requirements of modern life. In the light of these guidelines, the Prophet (PBUH)'s saying should be understood as warranting the communication of all or any resource or material that, if it stays in individuals/private hands, may cause monopolization and, thus, exploitation of social welfare/security.

Siba'i argues that Islam allows the state to intervene in matters of ownership for the collective benefit of the Muslim community. He discusses the concept of mutual social responsibility (at-takafal al-ijtima'i). He believes Western nations and Communists adopted similar ideas due to industrial development and the increasing unrest among the working class and the common public. However, Islam declared its socialistic system inclusive of all - at-takafal al-ijtima'i- thirteen centuries ago (Hanna & Gardner, [1969](#)). The system was not rooted in class hatred, nor did it originate from any revengeful desire to control the rich's wealth.

Conclusion

The study explored the concept of socialism and the views of different scholars about it. It also investigated the shortfalls of Capitalism, which led to the emergence of socialism. It also discussed the views of eminent Muslim scholars who considered socialism compatible with Islam, and thus, they advocated the idea of Islamic socialism. The present study also

explored the historical roots of the debate on Islam and socialism in the Muslim World.

The analysis suggests that Islamic socialism offers a viable alternative to Communism and Capitalism. Islamic revival movements, which emerged during Western political domination, emphasized values shared by Islam, the West, and the rest of the world and introduced the concept of Islamic Socialism. Many socialist principles, such as government ownership of certain production units, public social-welfare programs, and establishment of laws and regulations to prevent any kind of exploitation of the masses by the rich, align with the Islamic social justice system. Throughout history, Muslim scholars have promoted these values. Islam also encompasses an economic system, prescribing the establishment of prayer and the collection of zakat. Zakat, in modern terms, funds welfare programs and social services. Care and concern for the poor are fundamental to the Islamic faith and have been central to the prophets' message throughout history.

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