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The Religious and Anthropological Perspectives of Development and Poverty

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1. Introduction:

This paper examines the role of both religion and anthropology in development and accordingly reducing poverty. Within this introduction I intend to discuss the reason invited me to handle this problem. This reason is that I see both religion and anthropology can play a crucial role in the development process and accordingly lead to reducing poverty.

I will discuss the literature review about anthropology and development. In this respect, there are increasing calls to engage anthropology in the development process especially after the growing poverty and inequality and the increasing of social fragmentation. The aloofness of anthropology of development became subject to debate among politicians, development specialists and economics. Demands for anthropologists in development increased recently in particular in the forms of consultancy, short-term research on a pre-defined problem 1. The disengagement of anthropology from tackling the issue of poverty should not be considered that anthropology is irrelevant for poverty study or development research. An anthropological perspective in studying poverty within the framework of development reflects the fact that the development institutions considering poverty as a key development problematic². Anthropology contributes to social science through study of the culture's concept. Anthropologists through ethnographies, narrative analysis and participant observations are able to describe the bonds of human and social relations within the framework of living cultures. In order to understand the culture of the poor, it is necessary to live with them, learn their language and customs, and to identify with their problems and aspirations³.

2. The statement of Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the integrated relationship between both anthropology and poverty on one hand as discussed in the literature review above, and on the

other hand the relationship between religion and development , relationship between anthropology and development. it assures that both religion and anthropology have a role to play in development and reducing poverty.

3. The Problem of the Study

The problem of this study is investigating the relationship between religion from anthropological perspective and Development. The concept of religion from anthropological perspective and the religion vision of combating poverty considering Islam as an example. The paper starts with the discussion of the concept of religion, and then moves to discuss how both religion and anthropology deal with the human well- being. In this respect, a background about the increasing involvement of anthropologists in the development process is given. Since, the paper discusses mainly the problem of poverty; therefore, we will examine the means the Islamic religion adopts to combat poverty.

4. Methodology

The study is drawn based upon library research. A number of references were used to discuss the main concepts and complementary relationships between anthropology and religion, between religion and development, between anthropology and development.

5. What is Religion

From an anthropological perspective religion has been subject to many definitions, this paper will restrict itself the universal anthropological definition set by Clifford Geertz. Geertz defined religion as: (1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic⁴.

Durkheim's Definition:-

Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single community called a Church, all those adhere to them... religion must be an eminently collective thing⁵.

6. The Relation between Religion and Development:

As a matter of fact relation between religion and development can be identified through five modes. First, religion is an instrumental to development goals; second, religion affects the people's values; third, freedom and worship within religion are fundamental to human rights; fourth, religion is a constitutive part of the well-being of the people; fifth, religion is a political power that forms the society's structure through the economic, social, and political perspectives ⁶.

Furthermore, the role of religious ideas in economic development has a deep impact on the treatment of religion within the framework of social sciences. Weber observed that Protestants are more involved in industrial, business and trade than any other religions, this why the capitalist expanded in Western Europe not anywhere else. Weber explained the capitalistic development took place due to the features of Protestantism that include hard work, high labor productivity, high rate of saving and accordingly investment, producing goods beyond the mere satisfaction of material needs. In spite of the fact, Weber's opinion was subject to argument by some authors who based their views on the ground that some other countries such as Japan are Christians but managed to achieve development⁷.

The question poses itself in respect of the relationship between religion and development is that: is religion good for development all the way? The literature answered this question and said that, religion is not a panacea. Religion can be motivate to development it may also be obstruct or

undermine it. Religion motivates development through the involvement of religious peoples and institution in funding, innovation, empowerment, social movements, and service delivery. On the other hand, religion can obstruct development when the religious people and institutions incite violence, oppose empowerment, absorb fund, i.e, instead of building a school they can use it build a worship hall⁸.

7. Relationship between Anthropology and Development:

Anthropologists, to a great extent, have shown a great ambivalence in respect of development. Until recently, for anthropologists it was in some sense that it is axiomatic to see development as a debatable and even invasive concept. This perception about development was accepted by the scholars and practitioners on both sides of academia and politics. The 1990s has witnessed an active and productive debate about the relationship between anthropology and development. at the end of 1990s two broad schools of thought has emerged about the relationship between anthropology and development. Some anthropologists prefer an active engagement with development organizations seeking to transform development practice from within. This kind of anthropologists is involved in the development process on behalf of the poor. The other team is those distance themselves away from development establishment⁹.

Anthropologists became more involved in the development process especially after international development agencies. The international development agencies work requires certain skills that not widely exist among the academic anthropologists. However, since the rural development is the focus of the international development agencies, the need for applied for anthropology, professional employment, personal and professional benefits and the addition to the increasing number of anthropologist in academia, all these factors led to increasing potential contribution of anthropologist in development activities¹⁰.

8. The concept of Development

The first and foremost aim of the development is to improve the quality of life. Meeting the basic needs is no longer the sole necessary condition of life. Life needs a large number of requirements to cope with the contemporary needs of the human being. These requirements are high level of income, better education, better health care, better nutrition, cleaner environment, participating decision making, enjoying a higher cultural life, self respect.

The World Development Report ,1991,defined development as follows:

“Development must be conceived of as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty.

Development, in its essence, must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system , tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within the system , moves a way from the condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better¹¹”

The objectives of development

Based upon the definitions above we note that the development is a combination of social, economic and institutions process that seeks to meet the whole range human beings needs.

The following can be considered the general objectives of development¹²:

1. Raising the capability and widening the scope of life-sustaining options.
2. Increasing the level of living.
3. Expanding the economic and social option available to citizens.

9. Poverty Concept

In a very simple language poverty is defined as an inability to meet basic needs because of lack of resources. Extreme poverty means that households cannot meet the basic needs for

survival. They are chronically hungry, unable to access to health care, lack of safe drinking water and sanitation, cannot afford education for some or all of the children.

The extreme poverty is the most dangerous one and needs strenuous efforts to be tackled. Moderate poverty implies that the basic need are met but barely met. Relative poverty implies that the household level of income is lower than a given proportion of national income¹³.

Away from any definition of poverty, women from Moldova described poverty saying "poverty is pain; it feels like a disease. It attacks person not only materially but also morally. It eats away one's dignity and drives one to total despair. A person feels poverty every moment without even noticing it"¹⁴.

10. Poverty and Millennium Development Goals(MDGs):

Due to the fact that poverty is very danger for the human being, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) put the eradication of poverty as a number one goal. Poverty has a multifaceted nature as its impact is not restricted only to the lowest income but also those who are deprived of health, education and others aspects of human well-being. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger as goal one of the MDGs reflects to what extent how poverty is serious and it imperatively leads to hunger. Therefore, the MDGs stipulate that increasing the public investment and public institution seek to target the poor through expenditure on education, health and infrastructure. In addition, MDGs ensure that gender equality and empowering women in all respects, are strongly needed to combat poverty, hunger, and disease to ensure sustainable development¹⁵.

11. **The Islamic vision for combating poverty**¹⁶:- (this section is based upon a translation from Arabic version of The Poverty Problem and How Combated by Islam by Ussef El Karadawi, 2008)

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All over the world there is no society that all its individuals live in absolute affluence. Every society has widows, orphans, elders, those who working but their income is not sufficient to meet their basic needs, and finally there are individuals who are in the age of work and wishing to work but find no jobs. These groups of society need help to overcome their hard lives.

Islamic religion considers poverty a hard problem that must be uprooted drawing the attention that the poverty is danger on belief, behavior, human thought, family and society at large. A brief discussion of each of these is given below:-

1. Poverty is danger on Belief :-

Islamic religion strongly considers the poverty as the most dangerous threat to the belief, particularly the absolute poverty in a society where some of its groups live in a wealth. This dilemma aggravated when the poor is striving to earn his livelihood while the wealthy is relaxing of work. This situation creates a case of suspicion to the poor in respect of fair distribution of the income. This kind of thought from the side of the poor resulted from the unfair distribution of income made one of the precedents to say that, "if the poverty went to a country, the idolatry told it, please take me with you".

2. Poverty is danger on the morals and behavior:-

Poverty is danger on the morals and behavior of the individuals. The deprived poor sometimes enforced by his deprivation and desperation to behave in a way that is not accepted by the good moral and virtue. It is commonly said that the voice of stomach is louder than the voice of conscience.

3. Poverty is danger on the human thought:-

Poverty negative effect is not restricted to the spiritual or moral of the human being, but it includes also aspect of thought. The poor who does not have enough to meet his own needs and his

family necessities will not be able to think deeply. It is narrated that the Great Imam Abu Hianfa said once, “Do not consult who does not have a floor at his home” as he is dispirited and busy, and his judgment will not be fair.

4. Poverty is danger on the family:-

Poverty is danger on the entire family from different perspectives, on its composition, its continuity and its coherence. The poverty is main obstacle that prevents the youth from marriage due to the lack of the resources. Furthermore, poverty breaks the ties of kinship inside the family.

Poverty may enforce some fathers to kill their offspring as a result of want. Of course those kind fathers are not normal and the Quran prohibits such atrocities. In this respect, Allah says “Kill not your children on a plea of want, we provide sustenance for you and for them” (Al-Anaam: 151).

5. Poverty is danger on the stability of the entire society:-

Poverty constitutes a great threat to the security of the society as a whole. In this respect, the poor can endure poverty if it resulted from lack of resources and overpopulation in society, but he will not endure it if resulted from unfair distribution of the income inside the society. In societies , where there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor, a case of disorder prevail in the society and ties of brotherhood between people are broken.

Poverty is danger on the national sovereignty, freedom, and independence of nations. The deprived poor will not have enthusiasm to defend a country discriminated against him in favor of the rich. The absence of fairness in distributing income between citizens is negatively affecting the loyalty towards the nations.

To sum up the danger of poverty, it constitutes the prime threat to any society. It affects health, security, loyalty, stability, self esteem. The development process is basically concerned with fulfilling these goals of the human being and accordingly the nations.

Strategies of Islam in combating poverty:-

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Islamic Religion is keen that every person in the Islamic country, even if not a Muslim, must attain what enables him to live a reasonable life. Every individual should have, at least, the basic needs of food, shelter, clothes, etc.. In addition, every individual should have what enables him to perform the orders of Allah, to carry out the responsibilities of his own life and to have what protects him from the poverty and deprivation. In this section, the strategies of Islam in combating poverty and securing a human life for each person in the Islamic society are discussed. These strategies are as follows

1. Work :-

In Islam, work is the first weapon to combat poverty, the first cause to gain wealth and the first element to implant the earth. Every one in the Islamic society is required to work. Every Muslim is ordered by Allah to walk in the spacious earth and eat from the sustenance Allah furnishes to his creature.

Islam leaves the ways of work wide open before the Muslim to select what meets his qualifications and expertise and not impose a certain work on the individuals unless there is an interest of society.

The teachings of Islam in the Quran and the Hadeeths of Messenger Mohamed (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) urge Muslims to wok in order to benefit himself and his society. We mention here some examples:

In the Quran Allah says (interpretation of the meaning) “It is He Who has made the earth manageable for you, so traverse ye through its tracts and enjoy of the Sustenance which He furnishes: but unto Him is the Resurrection” (Al-Mulk:15).

The messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

“No one ever eats any better food than that earned by the work of his hand”

(Narrated by Al Bukhaari).

The messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave a unique example of how the ruler should be in directing his people, the example is , it was narrated by Anas Ibn Mallik (may Allah be pleased with him) that a man from Al Ansaar came to the prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asking for help, then the prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said to the man, “ is there is anything at your home?.” The man said” yes, a blanket, part of which we use spread underneath and a part we use to cover ourselves, and a cup we use to drink water.” The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said to the man go and bring them to me.” After the man gave the blanket and the cup to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the prophet said, who can buy these?. A man said, “ I will take them for a dirham .”

The Prophet said, who will pay more than a dirham ?.”then another man said , I will take them for two dirhams, the Prophet gave them to him and gave the two dirhams to the Ansaari , and say, “buy food with one dirham and give it to your family , and buy adze with the other and give it me. The messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) used the adze to stick a strike a stick in his hand and said to the ansaari,” go and cut wood and sell itI do not like to see you for fifteen days.” So the man went and chopped wood and sold it, then he came

and had earned ten dirhams. The ansaari bought garments with some and food with the some other.

This story tells us that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) did not give the ansari money but taught him how to earn his own sustenance as long as he is able to work. Working is better than asking people who may or may not give the pegger.

2. Rich people of the family take care of their relative poor:-

The rich of the families are obliged to take care of the relatives' poor, as a right and by virtue of ties of kinship. If the rich does not help his poor relatives' he will be punished by hungry and thirsty, he is not given a mouthful of food or a sip of water as a result of breaking his kinship ties.

3. Al Zakah:-

Al Zakah is one of the five pillars of Islamic Religion. Al Zakah is must for every Muslim provided that two conditions are met, first, the *nisab* (minimum wealth required to pay Al Zakah) and second, the *hwal* (passage of one year on earning the income or wealth)

The main purpose of Zakah is helping the poor. In the Muslim society there are widows, orphans, elders and those are not able to work, therefore, the Zakah is imposed as a percentage of the income of the rich and then directed to the poor and needy groups of the society. Al Zakah is not a choice but a fixed obligation from Allah.

Al Zakah must be paid whether the society needs it or not. In Islamic history , there were some periods in which there were no poor, this was in the period of Caliph Umar Ibn Abdel Aziz.

4. Voluntary charity :-

This kind of charitable giving is without obligation. Every Muslim can give the poor without asking and he is looking for reward from Allah.

12. Findings:

This paper reached , based upon the literature, that there is a strong , inter-related, and integrated set of relationships between anthropology and religion on one hand , and there is relationship between both religion and anthropology with the development. The relationship between anthropology and development discussed in this paper sends a strong message that Anthropology was not and must not be absent from participating in development process.

The important findings is that religions, based on the discussion of how Islam combat poverty as an example, play a crucial role in the development process on the condition that they (religions) employed in the way goes in the same direction with development not against it.

The core finding is that both religion and Anthropology are there for well-being. A kind of more involvement of anthropology in rural development and an effective role by the religious men prepare their societies to participate in and benefit from development.

13. Policy Recommendation:

Our aspiration should surpass meeting the basic needs to the quality of life. I propose the following recommendations:

1. The poor must be given the opportunity to participate in and benefit from the development process.
2. The poor need an honest guidance to draw the right pace to them.
3. The poor has the right to enjoy higher incomes, higher standard of health and nutrition, a clean environment, equal opportunity, more individual freedoms, a richer cultural life and self esteemed.
4. Our conviction must be” In the existence of poverty, there is an absence of development and security”. The aim of eradication poverty is not to have wealthy society but to have a human, stable, fair, loyal and productive society¹⁷.

14. Conclusion:

This paper discussed the role the religion, anthropology can play in the development and poverty alleviation. Both poverty and anthropology are mainly concerned with the well-being of human, therefore, the religion should be organized in the way that serves the development. Furthermore, Anthropologists must be involved and effectively participate in formulating and facilitating relations between the officials of the international development organizations that provide aids to developing countries rural development. The paper discussed Islamic religion's role in combating poverty.

Anthropology plays a crucial role in finding solutions to poverty as the anthropological perspective is that societies are structured in hierarchically ranked social groups that possess different accession of political power and attainment of resources available in society as one anthropologist said (Winthrop, 1991). Poverty is not a fate but it is a phenomenon that has it causes. Through development the causes of poverty will be tackled in all its aspects as development handles education, health, inequality, human rights, gender, and women empowerment. As the definition of development refers, it is a comprehensive process that encompasses a gamut of things basically and strongly b connected to well-being.

At present and future poverty is and will remain the key concern for the policy makers. The changes taking place around the world makes it necessary for setting priorities very rightly. A visionary strategy is needed to go beyond the income poverty and prepare for overcoming the social exclusion.

Finally, I retreat Adam Smith, 1776 saying” No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which by far the greater part of the numbers are poor and miserable. Furthermore, a

hungry man is an angry man, as narrated first in William Shakespeare's farce of "two gentlemen of Verona" in 1594.

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