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Relative Scarcity of Economic Resources: From Islamic Economics Perspective

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Abstract

The research article aims to explore the concept of relative scarcity in conventional economics, which is considered as the foundation of so called economic problem. Both capitalism and socialism, in spite of their vigorous fundamental differences in economic thought like; economic freedom, ownership of the resources, decision making power, government interference and wage price flexibility etc., do coincide on the issue of relative scarcity. Paradoxically , Islamic economic system based on the revealed knowledge of Quran and Sunnah refutes this concept and assures that the amount of natural resources is not only sufficient but they are created exactly in precise measure to fulfill the economic and materialistic needs of mankind. So, economic problem based on relative scarcity does not have any empirical evidence to show its authenticity. The researcher has reached the conclusion after a thorough discourse of arguments from both side; conventional and Islamic economics that the resources are in abundance and perfect measure at the disposal of humans. It is not the relative scarcity of the resources, but the miss- allocation of resources and mischievous and greedy human behavior who mishandle the resources are the major reason to create economic problem. Hence, the economic problem can easily be addressed and solved by following the divine instructions of Islamic economic thought mention in Quran and Sunnah.

Keywords: Relative Scarcity, Economic Problem, Islamic Economic.

1. Introduction

The concept of ‘Scarcity’ in conventional economics is one of the basic facts of human life. This concept could be considered as the core issue and one of the most fundamental discussions of conventional ‘Economics’. It is the foundation of the so called ‘economic problem’. There are some other important and basic concepts which are directly related with the concept of relative scarcity, like trade-off and choice and market value etc. These concepts also have great significance in the subject matter of conventional Economics, particularly the allocation of resources in the production of goods and services to fulfil the materialistic needs of humans. Hence, the production of goods and services is directly related with the availability of economic and natural resources which ultimately turn into factors of production and also human resources. Human wants and needs are unlimited and some of them occur repeatedly and have to be satisfied again and again. So, the process of satisfying desires is continuous and requires more and more economic resources and factors of production.

In Economics, scarcity occurs when there is disparity between limited availability of ‘gifted’ economic resources and the demand for these resources. In economics, scarcity is an important phenomenon to the extent that scarce goods are called economic goods and scarce resources are called economic resources. These resources have such fundamental nature and great significance that it became the essential part of definition of Economics presented by British economist Lionel Robbins in 1932 when he wrote the book, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economics Science*, wherein he defined Economics in terms of scarcity and said, “Economics is the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses”¹

The fundamental economic problem is to use these resources in such a way that maximum amount of economic goods and services are produced so that more and more human wants are satisfied. Economic goods and commodities have a face value, that is the price and their supply is limited as compare to the demand of these goods. It is also said about scarce goods that even at zero price their demand is more than their supply.

In the view of conventional economics, these resources are ‘free gift of nature’ and their supply is limited and finite and these exist less than their demand. In this context, human activity; both physical exertion and intellectual effort do not have any interference in the production or supply of these natural resources.

The theoretical concepts of Islamic Economics are based on the revealed knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah and these concepts also acknowledge that natural and economic resources are a free ‘Gift of God’ and human activity has got nothing to do with the production and supply of these resources. Meanwhile,

¹ Robbins, L. (1932), *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: MacMillan, 1932), P. 32

the concept of conventional economics regarding relative scarcity is totally different in Islamic Economics. As in conventional economics, among four factors of production; land, labor, capital and entrepreneur, land is the most fundamental one and it is considered as a free gift of nature and an exogenous factor which means, as said before, that man's physical and intellectual exertion is not included in the production and supply of these and economic resources, e.g. forest, wild livestock, minerals, rivers, oceans, oil, gas, and anything extracted from these natural resources is also considered a part of land in its pure form or raw form.

The creation of land and this universe as a result of the Big Bang makes the conventional view of natural resources entirely different from the Islamic Economic perspective. In the Quran we have another approach to understand the creation of land and all related resources. It is not the self-created Big Bang theory which resulted in the creation of land and other natural resources, but it is purely the creation of Allah. The difference in the view points of secular and Islamic economics about the creation and origin of the universe is a major difference and it leads to some further crystal clear fundamental differences in the theoretical approaches of both economic systems.

In this article, the researcher has attempted to highlight the difference between conventional and Islamic economic systems concerning the creation of natural resources and their abundance in terms of being sufficient for human society. Islamic economics does not accept the secular viewpoint that there is a gap between limited economic resources and theoretically endless wants and needs of human-beings. It is not the scarcity of resources that creates the fundamental economic problem, but it is the waste of these valuable resources and misuse, mismanagement and misallocation of these precious resources which Allah Almighty created to give the satisfaction of materialistic needs and human wants in society. The potential prosperity and development of society is concerned with some other factors, the behavior of humans in terms of using these resources and how they consume the produced goods and services. It is not the scarcity of natural resources that creates the fundamental economic problem, but it is the irresponsible behavior of humans and their mischief in the land. The greed of those who occupy the resources and their misuse of resources create economic problems. The teachings of the Quran shed light on the fact that the resources are abundant and sufficient for the use of humans and the Quran also instructs on how to use these resources responsibly and carefully whilst being thankful to the Creator.

2. Research Question

The fundamental research question of this article is stated as, what is the difference between the viewpoints of the Islamic economic system and secular economic systems; both capitalism and socialism about relative scarcity of

economic resources in the light of Quranic teachings and conventional economic literature. The related questions are;

- Is there any concept of relative scarcity in the Islamic economic system?
- Is the Islamic view about the creation of the universe and natural resources similar to the conventional and secular economic views?
- What are the teachings of the revealed knowledge about resources and their abundance?
- What is the foundation of the Islamic economic system about the creation and abundance of natural and economic resources?
- Can the Islamic view of these resources and relative scarcity make a difference and produce some impact on the fundamental theory of economic problem?

These are some basic and important questions, and the author of the research is aiming to explore and find the answers in the light of revealed knowledge, (the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah) which is the foundation of the Islamic economic system and also contemporary and relevant literature of conventional and secular economic systems; both capitalism and socialism.

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative research method and analytical and critical approach has been used in this research paper. Published authentic data and material in the form of books, articles, from journals and newspapers, and other literature from academic circles have been reviewed and the information utilized in the discourse of the critical subject matter, after the assurance of authenticity and reliability has been confirmed. Internet resources have also been used and the originality of the materials has been assured. Moreover, consultations and discussions with senior faculty members and researchers were also taken into consideration while writing this paper.

4. Literature Review

The concept of relative scarcity and the resulting concept of the economic problem is one of the fundamental issues in economic literature across all ages. This concept was introduced by L. Robbins who wrote the book in 1932 'An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economics'² wherein he described Economics as a social science as it involves the application of human behavior and is the establishment of a scientific relationship between scarce means and unlimited ends. In fact, the foundation of this concept was first introduced in the Malthusian Trap, that was mentioned in the Malthusian Law of Population which he explained in his book 'An Essay in the Principles of Population published in 1798.'³ Malthus observed that an increase in a nation's food production improved the well-being of the population, but the improvement was temporary because it

² Robbins, L. An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economics' P. 55

³ Malthus, Thomas, R. (1798[1976]), An Essay on the Principle of Population (London : W.W. Norton and Company)

led to population growth, which in turn restored the original per capita production level. He revised his work and published some later edition of his book. The main theme of his population law is that the population increases in a geometrical progression (e.g. 2, 6, 18, 54, 162....) $a, ar, ar^2, ar^3, ar^4, \dots$ the constant multiplier is 3, while the food production increased in an arithmetic progression (e.g. 5, 11, 17, 23, 29, 35....) $a, a+d, a+2d, a+3d, \dots$ the constant difference is 6.

David Ricardo (1817)⁴ gave a new dimension and different interpretation to the concept of scarcity of nature which refers to the decreasing quality of land. It is a natural resource readily available but always in a declining quality.

Here it is interesting to remember that Robbins explained the concept of relative scarcity and Malthus described the notion of absolute scarcity. So, these two basic concepts are the foundations of the economic problem in conventional economics. Samuelson (1980)⁵ argues that scarcity is a reality as there is only a limited amount of resources, both human and non-human, that are capable of producing a limited amount of economic goods to satisfy human needs and wants. Scarcity occurs because of demand-induced, supply-induced, and structural reasons (Heyne, et al. 2014).⁶

Adel Daoud (2010)⁷ wrote about the relative and absolute scarcity concepts of Robbins and Ricardo respectively. But he observed that both concepts overlooked abundance and sufficiency, which are important states in the social provisioning process. Risa Bhinekawati (2021)⁸ also wrote a research article 'Comparing the Concepts of Scarcity: Conventional vs Islamic Economics' wherein she observed that scarcity is the central issue in economics. She explained that conventional economics recognized both absolute and relative scarcities while Islamic economics recognised only relative scarcity and not absolute scarcity because Allah Almighty has provided sufficient resources for the whole world. So, it is not the scarcity of resources that causes the economic problem but it is the moral value or human behavior in managing the relative scarcity to achieve the welfare and justice.

⁴ Ricardo, David, (1817[1951]) *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (Cambridge University Press)

⁵ Samuelson, P. (1980) *Economics* (11th ed.) (New York: McGraw-Hill)

⁶ Heyne, P., Peter, J., & Prychitko, D. (2014). *The Economic Way of Thinking* (13th Ed.). Pearson

⁷ Daoud, Adel, (2010), 'Robbins and Malthus on Scarcity, Abundance, and Sufficiency: The Missing Sociocultural Element', *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*

Vol. 69, No. 4 (OCTOBER, 2010), pp. 1206-1229 (24 pages), Published By: Willy

⁸ Bhinekawati, R. (2021). Comparing the Concept of Scarcity: Conventional vs. Islamic Economics. *Journal of Applied Business and Economics*, 23(3).

<https://doi.org/10.33423/jabe.v23i3.4352> (accessed: 27/10/2023)

Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins (2015)⁹ wrote the book ‘World Hunger’ which explores why hunger still exists when there is such abundance of food. The book is mostly not about food or the absence of food, but it is a book about politics. It explains that the world hunger is made up story. The resources are in abundance. It is the politics of certain powers who want to occupy the resources in developing countries through various development models, like International Aid and Green Revolution, and the most compelling argument made in the book is that these models, which were supposed to help and alleviate the hunger and poverty from these developing countries, worsened the problem. The authors, based on their empirical (correlation model) evidence, suggested that there was not any relationship between hunger and overpopulation or population density. In their opinion, it is not the ‘scarcity of the resources’ but it is the ‘Scarcity of Democracy’ that caused the problem of ‘World Hunger’. The problem is because of political, social and economic inequality. The most insightful and profoundly disturbing chapters are the ones in which the authors conclude that hunger and poverty will exist as long as the people are powerless.

Those who have written on the topic of scarcity from a different perspective are mainly Muslim economists and they attempted to explain how the Islamic concept of scarcity is different from the conventional one. Mohammad Abdul Mannan (1982)¹⁰ wrote a detailed research paper and it was published by center of Islamic Economics King Abdul Aziz University Jeddah with the title ‘Scarcity, Choice and Opportunity Cost: Their Dimensions in Islamic Economics’. In his paper he has tried to introduce and explore Islamic dimensions of scarcity and choice and compare them with modern western economics as the problem of scarcity and choice provide the foundation of the economic problem. To him Islamic economics is a social science that studies the economic problems in the context of Islamic values. He has the view like Naqvi (1978)¹¹, that there is nothing wrong in internalizing and assimilating western thought into Islamic economics as long as they do not ‘run counter to basic Islamic ethical values’. Therefore, he suggests that the concept of limited resources is not alien to Islamic economics. He also discussed the difference between positive and normative economics and suggests that Islamic economics has little importance in terms of distinction between positive and normative economics because of its uniqueness. He thinks that western economics is based on the principle of profit maximization whereas Islamic economics is based on the normative principles of the Quran and Sunnah,

⁹ Lappe, Frances, M. and Collins, Joseph, (2015), ‘World Hunger: 10 Myths (New York: Grove Press)

¹⁰ Mannan, M. Abdul, (1982), Scarcity, Choice and Opportunity Cost: Their Dimensions in Islamic Economics (Jeddah: King Abdul Aziz University)

¹¹ Naqvi, N.H. (1978), ‘Ethical Foundations of Islamic Economics’ in Islamic Studies, Vol. XVII No.2, Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad. P. 106

with the objectives of Shariah based on the concept of total human welfare and fulfillment of life working through the principles cooperation and limited competition at both an individual and state level, for example, earning profit is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

As far as the concept of scarcity is concerned, he suggests that it has to be understood in the context of Islamic ethical values and it should not be confused with the notion of the unlimited 'bounties of Allah'. Merely, the notion of the unlimited material wants of mankind and limited resources to fulfill these wants is compatible with Islamic rationality. Islamic rationality embodies not only economic but also social and moral objectives. He advocates that unlimited bounties of Allah and God-given natural resources are unlimited opportunities provided to all for proper exploitation. Because these resources are not in the finished product form, human effort is required to transform them into consumption and capital goods and this human involvement in the process of production and distribution is not contradictory to the concept of scarcity of conventional economics. He gave references from the Quran in support of his viewpoint. He says that there is a limit to human effort and capacity to explore and utilize the resources. Allah Almighty says;

وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى، وَأَنْ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يَرَى

Man can have nothing but what he strives for, and indeed his effort will be seen soon¹².

He reiterates that human involvement and endeavor is an essential to the production process which provides consumer goods and services for the satisfaction of human wants. In terms of the Quran when the prayer has been performed then scatter in the land to seek the bounties of Allah (provision of life);

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ الصَّلَاةُ فَانْتَشِرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَابْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ

And when prayer is finished, then disperse through the land and seek the bounty of Allah¹³.

He also suggests that the concept of scarcity of resources can also be comprehended through satisfying the needs of the poor and the needy in the form of transfer payments. There is repeated emphasis in the Quran about giving charity and alms to the needy and poor and comparatively disadvantaged people of the society. He concludes that 'If scarcity of nature sets the stage for economic problem, it is the acquisitive behaviour of man that we find in a market society which makes the economic problem dangerously chronic and highly complex'.¹⁴

¹² Al-Quran 53: 39,40

¹³ Al-Quran 62: 10

¹⁴ Mannan, M. Abdul, Scarcity, Choice and Opportunity Cost: Their Dimensions in Islamic Economics p. 14

Israrul Haque (2010)¹⁵ writes that ‘From the Islamic viewpoint, the notion that resources are scarce is not acceptable in the absolute sense because Allah, the Creator, has provided the resources in just, if not abundant, quantities. The scarcity arises on account of the unrestricted claims on the resources and the failure of human beings in their equitable distribution’. He also suggests that ‘Islamic economics aims at the distribution of resources ensuring the wellbeing (*falah*) and good lives (*hayat tayyiba*) of human beings’. He nullifies the justification of interest saying ‘Provision of capital is the responsibility of entrepreneurship and so there is no justification of payment of any additional payment of interest over and above the profit’. According to him, profit in the Islamic system takes care of all that the entrepreneur does, including arrangement of capital.

Fareed F. Khoja (2010)¹⁶ explains the view of Capitalism that the economic problem which faces any society is the scarcity of commodities and services. Human needs are increasing steadily, and products are continuously decreasing and unable to satisfy the growing needs of the people. He suggests that this view is erroneous and contradicts reality. He describes that human needs are very basic and simple, and they are limited but luxuries are more expensive, and they require a huge amount of natural resources for production. He concludes that ‘the economic problem in reality, is the distribution of the resources and services enabling every individual to satisfy all basic needs completely, and after that, helping them to strive towards attaining their luxuries’. According to him the basic needs of a man as a human do not increase but the need for luxuries may, due to urbanization improvement. Having created the resources for humans, Allah (swt) did not mention anything related to these resources. It indicates that He left the resources to the disposal of humans and He did not intervene in the utilisation of these resources.

Dr Shouqi Ahmad Dunya (2015)¹⁷ defines the relative scarcity as the incapability of resources or factors of production or goods and services to satisfy all the needs and wants of mankind. In a small book titled as “المشكلة الاقتصادية وحقيقة الندرة” he explains the concept of relative scarcity and how it is related with the economic problem, like insufficient economic resources, unlimited needs humans and limited factors of production, and also trade-offs between these resources and the problem of choice, and the core question of what, how and for whom to

¹⁵ Haque, Israrul, (2010), ‘The Quran and the Concept of the Scarcity’, in Economic Problems and Teachings of Quran’ ed by Islahi, Abdul Azim and Ahmad, Ausaf (Aligarh, India: Idarah Ulum al-Quran)

¹⁶ Khoja, Fareed, F(2010), ‘Economic Justice: Islamic Economic System Versus Capitalism’ in Economic Problems and Teachings of Quran, ed by Islahi, Abdul Azim and Ahmad, Ausaf, (Aligarh, India: Idarah Ulum al-Quran, P. 71

¹⁷ Dunya, Shouqi, A. (2015), “المشكلة الاقتصادية وحقيقة الندرة النسبية” in الاقتصاد الإسلامي available at <https://www.aliqtisadalislami.net/المشكلة-الاقتصادية-وحقيقة-الندرة-النسبية/> (accessed 15/11/2023)

produce. He mentions that economic resources and factors of production are sufficient for the fulfillment of basic needs, but these may be insufficient for luxuries as needs are limited but luxuries are endless and unlimited. He has the opinion that there is a dire need to reconsider the economic problem and he suggests the active rationalization of the needs, full employment and proper allocation of the resources and last but not the least, the equitable distribution of wealth.

In the above discussion, we have thoroughly examined and critically analyzed the various concepts and different views of some Muslim and non-Muslim economists about relative scarcity of economic resources. Here it's interesting to note that the classical view in capitalism and even in socialism is the same; that human wants and material needs are increasing massively and the economic resources and factors of production to meet these unlimited wants are insufficient and not in abundance. Among them, the exceptional view is what was present in the book 'World Hunger' by Lappe and Collins and they refuted the myth that population and hunger have any correlation based on their empirical studies. The conventional economists do not refute the significance of land as a factor of production and all other natural resources are related with this land. They also accept that this land is a free gift of Nature. But they do not accept the Power of Allah (swt) in the creation of Land and its resources which are fundamental to satisfy the materialistic needs and physical wants of mankind.

The concept of the conventional scarcity is pushing the prices higher in the market, beyond the reach of the people so that they cannot afford the products. The poverty indicators of the World Bank indicate that if someone is earning \$2 a day then he is not poor. Half of the world population does not earn this much money every day, so they don't have access to the markets to buy the products they need to satisfy their basic needs. The conventional economists advocate that the population of the world is increasing immensely, and the resources are not increasing in the same pattern, which is why there is a substantial gap between demand and supply, and this causes the economic problem. The sellers sell their products at premium prices to gain maximum profits so as to capture the resources as much as possible. Consequently, the economists suggest that the growth of the population ought to be curtailed as it does not supersede economic growth.

5. The Relative Scarcity from an Islamic Perspective

The Muslim economists have a different view and they base their argument on the Quranic concept that Allah (swt) had guaranteed provision for all the creations, including mankind. The involvement of human activity and physical exertion of labor force as major component of production function also has limited aspect.

<https://www.aliqtisadalislami.net/المشكلة-الاقتصادية-وحقيقة-الندرة-النسبية/at> the lower echelons to leave the market dejected as they cannot afford the product. If we look at the poverty indicators by the World Bank consider a person to be not poor

if he earns \$2 a day, still there is about half of the world which is not fortunate to have that much income. So, half of the world cannot access resources just because sellers are selling the scarce resource with a premium price. Economists in conventional economics advocate that the major reason for this issue is the rising population, and propose that humans need to manage and reduce the number of children they want to bring in this world. In response to this behavior of humans, Allah says in Quran in following verses that have faith in Allah, he has taken the responsibility to provide provision of resources, so humans need not to indulge in competition and nor in overspending. This scarcity is forcing prices in the market to raise causing people whose incomes are at the lower echelons to leave the market dejected as they cannot afford the product. If we look at the poverty indicators by the World Bank consider a person to be not poor if he earns \$2 a day, still there is about half of the world which is not fortunate to have that much income. So, half of the world cannot access resources just because sellers are selling the scarce resource with a premium price. Economists in conventional economics advocate that the major reason for this issue is the rising population, and propose that humans need to manage and reduce the number of children they want to bring in this world. In response to this behavior of humans, Allah says in Quran in following verses that have faith in Allah, he has taken the responsibility to provide provision of resources, so humans need not to indulge in competition and nor in overspending. This scarcity is forcing prices in the market to raise causing people whose incomes are at the lower echelons to leave the market dejected as they cannot afford the product. If we look at the poverty indicators by the World Bank consider a person to be not poor if he earns \$2 a day, still there is about half of the world which is not fortunate to have that much income. So, half of the world cannot access resources just because sellers are selling the scarce resource with a premium price. Economists in conventional economics advocate that the major reason for this issue is the rising population, and propose that humans need to manage and reduce the number of children they want to bring in this world. In response to this behavior of humans, Allah says in Quran in following verses that have faith in Allah, he has taken the responsibility to provide provision of resources, so humans need not to indulge in competition and nor in overspending. The concept of relative scarcity in the paradigm of Islamic economics is based on the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. It is discussed in the following fundamental points;

- Allah (swt) is the Creator of ‘Land’ and ‘Natural Resources’
- Instrumental role of land and water in the creation of provisions of life
- The Absolute Power of Allah (swt) to preserve these resources
- Guaranteed sponsorship of Allah (swt) to provide sustenance
- Land, Water and other resources are for the service of humans
- Significance of human behavior in determining the economic circumstances

In the Quran, we find the fact that first human Adam and his wife Eve were living in the heavens. The whispering of Shaytan and subsequent disobedience of Allah (swt) caused the first human couple to depart from the heavens and live on the face earth. (See Quran, 1:35,36, 7:19-25)¹⁸. It was the Wisdom and Decree of Allah (swt) that He ordained the humans to live and dwell on the land as a vicegerent of Allah (swt) and take advantage of the beneficial resources and get benefits from everything Allah (swt) has created for them for a certain time period. He says in the following verse, human being as vicegerent of Allah,

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِیْفَةً

‘Remember’ when your Lord said to the angels, “I am going to place a successive ‘human’ authority on earth.”¹⁹

Also, in this verse He says,

وَلَكُمْ فِى الْاَرْضِ مَسٰکِنٌ وَمَتَاعٌ اِلٰى حَیْنٍ

You will find in the earth a residence and provision for your appointed stay. In another Surah it has been explained in the following way.²⁰

قَالَ عَسٰى رَبُّكُمْ اَنْ یُّهْلِكَ عَدُوُّكُمْ وَیَسْتَخْلِفَکُمْ فِى الْاَرْضِ فِیَنْظُرْ کَیْفَ تَعْمَلُوْنَ

He replied, perhaps your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you successors in the land to see what you will do.²¹

In another Surah it has been described in this way.

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاکُمْ خَلِیْفَ فِى الْاَرْضِ مِنْۢ بَعْدِهِمْ لِنَنْظُرَ کَیْفَ تَعْمَلُوْنَ

Then we made you their successors in the land to see how you would act.²²

There is another Surah where this concept has been mentioned in the following way,

وَهُوَ الَّذِیْ جَعَلْکُمْ خَلِیْفَ الْاَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَکُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجٰتٍ لِّیَبْلُوْکُمْ فِیْ مَا اٰتٰکُمْ اِنَّ رَبَّکَ سَرِیْعُ الْعِقَابِ وَاِنَّهٗ لَغَفُوْرٌ رَّحِیْمٌ

He is the One Who has placed you as successors on earth and elevated some you in rank over others, so He may test you with what He has given you. Surely your Lord is swift in Punishment, but He is certainly All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.²³

¹⁸ Al-Quran 1: 35-36;7: 19-25

¹⁹ Al-Quran 1 : 30

²⁰ Al-Quran 7: 24

²¹ Al-Quran 7 : 129

²² Al-Quran 10 : 14

²³ Al-Quran 6: 165

The following verse is very conclusive and comprehensive about this phenomenon.

قَالَ يَقَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ هُوَ أَنشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَاسْتَعْمَرَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ثُمَّ تَوْبُوا إِلَيْهِ إِنَّ رَبِّي قَرِيبٌ مُجِيبٌ

‘Salih’ said O my people! Worship Allah, You have no God other than Him, He is the One Who produced you from the earth and settled you on it. So seek His forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance, Surely my Lord is Ever Near, All responsive to Prayers.²⁴

In the Quranic verses mentioned above, we need to focus on the words, ‘خليفة’, (استعمار في الأرض) and (استخلاف في الأرض) as they explicitly clarify the role of human being in the vast universe as a vicegerent of Allah (swt). The renowned scholar of Quranic sciences, Imam Ibn Kathir, explained what is meant by these words specifically in these verses. He says the word *Khalifah* means mankind reproducing generation after generation. He described the following verses from Quran as a reference to this meaning (*And it is He Who has made you (Khala'if) generations coming after generations, replacing each other on the earth*) (6:165) Also, (*And makes you (Khulafa') inheritors of the earth*) (27:62). Moreover, (*And if it were Our will, We would have (destroyed you (mankind all, and) made angels to replace you (Yakhlufun) on the earth.)*) (43: 60) and, (*Then after them succeeded an (evil) generation (Khalif))*) (7:169). It appears that Allah was not referring to Adam specifically as *Khalifah*, otherwise he would not have allowed the angels' statement mentioned here. Just have look at the meaning of another verse, (*Then We made you successors after them, generations after generations in the land, that We might see how you would work.*) (10:14). As far as the words (استعمار في الأرض) are concerned, Imam Ibn Kathir mentioned the meaning as following; (*He brought you forth from the earth*). This means: “He began your creation from it (the earth). From it He created your father, Adam.” Also, (*and settled you therein,*) which means: “He made you prosperous in the earth. You are settled in it and you treasure it.”²⁵

So, in the Quran, we find a completely different story about the creation of the resources and their beneficence to the mankind. There is no concept of the ‘Big Bang’ or a ‘Self-Created’ universe. The resources are purely and basically created by Allah (swt). There is no human involvement or physical participation from the side of Man to produce these resources. Later, these resources are allocated to produce goods and services for the satisfaction of the physical needs

²⁴ Al-Quran 11: 61

²⁵ Ibn Kathir, (d.784 AH), Tafseer Al-Quran Al-Azeem, English Translation, <https://www.alim.org/quran/tafsir/ibn-kathir/surah/77/0/> (Accessed 8/9/2023)

and materialistic wants of mankind. Allah (swt) numerously mentioned in the Quran that He is the One Who creates for you the provision of life, He creates resources, He causes rain to fall from the sky, and from this rain He creates for you the plants and trees and provides you with the provision of life. There is specifically mention of this reality that you O mankind are not able to do it. Allah has mentioned this reality in the Quran that when He created the earth and heavens, then He created the resources and placed them in the earth. Allah Almighty said in one chapter as following;

قُلْ أَبِئْكُمْ لَتَكْفُرُونَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَتَجْعَلُونَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا ذَلِكَ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ - وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا وَبَرَكَ فِيهَا وَقَدَّرَ فِيهَا أَقْوَاتَهَا فِي أَرْبَعَةِ أَيَّامٍ - سَوَاءً لِّلْسَائِلِينَ

Ask 'them, O Prophet', "How can you disbelieve in the One Who created the earth in two Days? And how can you set up equals with Him? That is the Lord of all worlds. He placed on the earth firm mountains, standing high, showered His blessings upon it, and ordained 'all' its means of sustenance-totaling four Days exactly, for all who ask.²⁶

These verses explicitly explain that Allah has placed the resources and His blessings in the earth for the use of mankind and livestock. Also, in the Quran we find that Allah (swt) has taken the responsibility of providing the essential provision to all the people and living creature.

There is another verse in another chapter which has more clarification about the sufficiency of the land. Allah Almighty said;

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا، أَحْيَاءَ وَأَمْوَاتًا، وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ شَامِخَاتٍ وَأَسْقَيْنَكُم مَّاءً فُرَاتًا

Have We not made the earth a lodging, for the living and the dead, and placed upon it towering, firm mountains, and given you fresh water to drink.

The renowned scholar of Quranic studies, Ibn Kathir, explained the meaning of (كفاتا) in his well-known and famous book of Tafseer Ibn Kathir as following: 'Have We not made the earth Kifat for the living and the dead'. Ibn `Abbas said, "Kifat means a place of shelter." Mujahid said, "It holds the dead so that nothing is seen of it." Ash-Sha`bi said, "Its interior is for you dead and its surface is for you living." Mujahid and Qatadah also said that 'And have placed therein fixed towers (meaning the mountains). The earth is held in place with them so that it does not shake and sway.'²⁷ The word *Kifat* is derivative of *Kafayah*, means sufficient. The creation of land and its sufficiency in terms of resources and provisions of life for all the living creations, who need the worldly materialistic

²⁶ Al-Quran 41:9,10

²⁷ Ibn Kathir, (d.784 AH), Tafseer Al-Quran Al-Azeem, English Translation, <https://www.alim.org/quran/tafsir/ibn-kathir/surah/77/0/> (Accessed 8/9/2023)

resources to satisfy their physical needs, has been mentioned in the Quran. So, indulging in unhealthy competition which leads to the concentration of wealth and possession of the unutilized resources in a few hands is not in the interest of the wider population. Socio-economic disparities and unequal distribution of wealth and such other economic problems are the consequences of such greedy and undesirable human behavior. The usury based financial transaction and interest-bearing world financial system is the major reason for such economic problems. The land and water is the creation of Allah (swt) and providing the basic sustenance and provisions of life is completely in the Power of Allah.

Allah (swt) says in Surah Ibrahim,

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا
لَكُمْ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْفُلْكَ لِتَجْرِيَ فِي الْبَحْرِ بِأَمْرِهِ وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الْأَنْهَارَ- وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ الشَّمْسَ
وَالْقَمَرَ دَآبِّينَ- وَسَخَّرَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ

It is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth and sends down rain from the sky, causing fruits to grow as a provision for you. He has subjected the ships for your service, sailing through the sea by His command, and has subjected the rivers for you. He has 'also' subjected for you the sun and the moon, both constantly orbiting, and has subjected the day and night for you.²⁸

Furthermore, He says in Surah Al-Nahal as following,

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لَكُمْ مِنْهُ شَرَابٌ وَ مِنْهُ شَجَرٌ فِيهِ تُسِيمُونَ- يُنْبِتُ لَكُمْ
بِهِ الزَّرْعَ وَالزَّيْتُونَ وَالنَّخِيلَ وَالْأَعْنَابَ وَ مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ- إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِقَوْمٍ
يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

He is the One Who sends down rain from the sky, from which you drink and by which plants grow for your cattle to graze. With it He produces for you 'various' crops, olives, palm trees, grapevines, and every type of fruit. Surely in this is a sign for those who reflect.²⁹

In Surah Al-Naml this fact has been mentioned that only Allah creates the plants and fruits for you from the water and you can create it.

أَمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَأَنْزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَنْبَتْنَا بِهِ حَدَائِقَ ذَاتَ بَهْجَةٍ
مَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُنْبِتُوا شَجَرَهَا-إِنَّ مَعَ اللَّهِ-بَلْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ يَعِدِلُونَ

Or 'ask them,' "Who created the heavens and the earth, and sends down rain for you from the sky, by which We cause delightful gardens to grow? You could never cause their trees to grow. Was it another god besides Allah?" Absolutely not! But they are a people who set up equals 'to Allah'!³⁰

²⁸ Al-Quran 14: 32,33

²⁹ Al-Quran 16: 10, 11

³⁰ Al-Quran 27: 60

It is not only humans who obtain their food and provisions in the form of fruits and grains, but also their livestock and cattle who get their food from this land and water. It is Allah Who provides food for you and your livestock, causing the rain and sending down water and flowing this water in the rivers and canals. All this is in the Power of Allah and humans are not able to control this water. Look at another verse from Surah Al-Sajdah where Allah (swt) says,

أَو لَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا تَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ أَنْعَامُهُمْ
وَأَنْفُسُهُمْ أَفَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ

Do they not see how We drive rain to parched land, producing 'various' crops from which they and their cattle eat? Will they not then see?³¹

Diversification of the land and its fertility and suitability for cultivation is also in the power of Allah (swt). He is the one who makes various types of landscapes, where one part of the land is fertile and another one is barren. The good part produces nice food and the bad one does not produce anything fruitful. Pointing to this reality, Allah (swt) says,

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيحَ بُشْرًا يَبْدِي رَحْمَتَهُ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَقْلَّتْ سَحَابًا ثِقَالًا سُقْنَاهُ لِبَلَدٍ
مَّيِّتٍ فَأَنْزَلْنَا بِهِ الْمَاءَ فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ-كَذَٰلِكَ نُخْرِجُ الْمَوْتَىٰ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ
وَالْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ يَخْرُجُ نَبَاتُهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ-وَالَّذِي خَبَتْ لَا يَخْرُجُ إِلَّا نَكِدًا-كَذَٰلِكَ نَنْصَرِفُ
الْأَيْتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَشْكُرُونَ

Keeping water in the land as reservoir or storing this water at certain level in the land so it could be extracted to water the crops occasionally, is completely in Allah's Power. If He takes this water away or makes it very deep, then humans would be unable to extract it and use it, in spite of all their technological developments. Allah (swt) says.³²

وَأَرْسَلْنَا الرِّيحَ لَوَاقِحَ فَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمُوهُ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ لَهُ بِخَازِنِينَ

We send fertilizing winds, and bring down rain from the sky for you to drink. It is not you who hold its reserves.³³

The same topic has been mentioned in another surah in a different format, emphasising on the reality that the water which is the most significant source of life and provisions of life for humans and all other livestock and wildlife, is completely in the power of Allah (swt) and Allah sends down this with an estimate as much as is required, and then He is the One Who keeps it stored in the

³¹ Al-Quran 32: 27

³² Al-Quran 7: 57,58

³³ Al-Quran 15: 22

land for future usage, and He is the One Who has the absolute power to take it away. Allah (swt) mentions in the following words.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَنَتْهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنَّا عَلَى ذَهَابٍ بِهِ لَقَادِرُونَ

We send down rain from the sky in perfect measure, causing it to soak into the earth. And We are surely able to take it away.³⁴

As it has already been described that water is a great blessing of Allah and the most fundamental source of life, Allah (swt) says the if He wills, He can take it away or He can deepen it in the land and it would not in the reach of humans to be taken it out from the land for their personal use as drinking and watering their cultivation and agriculture. Allah (swt) says in another Surah as following,

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَاؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَنْ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِمَاءٍ مَعِينٍ

Say, "Consider this: if your water were to sink 'into the earth', then who 'else' could bring you flowing water?"³⁵

So, it is not in the custody of Man to preserve and keep these fundamental resources and take the advantage from them without the Decree and Will of Allah. Regarding the creation of earth and heavens and creating every living creature from water has been mentioned in Surah Al-Anbiya as following,

أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

Do the disbelievers not realize that the heavens and earth were 'once' one mass then We split them apart? And We created from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?³⁶

The significance of water for the creation of natural resources, and sending down this water from the sky as rain, and its storage in the earth or reservoir, and then creating different types of fruits, is entirely in the hands of Allah.

The Quran also explains the Patronage of Allah to provide the sustenance to all living creatures, meaning that the resources are created by Allah and they are sufficient for all human beings and even for all the living creatures on the face of earth. Allah Almighty says in the Quran more than once;

وما من دابة في الأرض إلا على الله رزقها

This scarcity is forcing prices in the market to raise causing people whose incomes are at the lower echelons to leave the market dejected as they cannot afford the product. If we look at the poverty indicators by the World Bank consider a person to be not poor if he earns \$2 a day, still there is about half of the world which is not fortunate to have that much income. So, half of the world cannot access resources just because sellers are selling the scarce resource with a

³⁴ Al-Quran 23: 18

³⁵ Al-Quran 67: 32

³⁶ Al-Quran 21: 30

premium price. Economists in conventional economics advocate that the major reason for this issue is the rising population, and propose that humans need to manage and reduce the number of children they want to bring in this world. In response to this behavior of humans, Allah says in Quran in following verses that have faith in Allah, he has taken the responsibility to provide provision of resources, so humans need not to indulge in competition and nor in overspending.

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ رِزْقُهَا وَيَعْلَمُ مُسْتَقَرَّهَا وَمُسْتَوْدَعَهَا كُلٌّ فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ

There is no moving creature on earth whose provision is not guaranteed by Allah. And He knows where it lives and where it is laid to rest. All is 'written' in a perfect Record.³⁷

وَكَايِنٍ مِّنْ دَابَّةٍ لَا تَحْمِلُ رِزْقَهَا، اللَّهُ يَرْزُقُهَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

How many are the creatures that cannot secure their provisions! 'It is' Allah 'Who' provides.³⁸

In these two verses Allah (swt) has declared that the provision of all the living creatures is guaranteed by Allah (swt), and for the sake of food and fear of hunger one should not think about curtailing the population. Someone is not allowed to kill children for gaining the worldly resources. Allah Almighty very explicitly forbade from this practice saying;

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ مِّنْ إِمْلَاقٍ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُكُمْ وَإِيَّاهُمْ

Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for you and for them. ³⁹

In another chapter, Allah Almighty forbade from this practice of killing the children based on the fact that he provides provision for both you and your children

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطَاً كَبِيراً

Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Surely killing them is a heinous sin.⁴⁰

These two verses are a very clear indication that because of hunger and poverty, someone is not allowed to practise population control and use contraceptive measures to decrease population.

It is the responsibility of Man to apply physical exertion in the exploration of these resources and take advantage of them for the benefit of mankind and also for other creations by acting as a vicegerent of Allah (swt). In the Quran, Allah

³⁷ Al-Quran 11 : 6

³⁸ Al-Quran 29 : 60

³⁹ Al-Quran 6 : 151

⁴⁰ Al-Quran 17 : 31

says, that your 'Rizq' (sustenance) is in the heavens and Allah offers you with provisions of life.

وَفِي السَّمَاءِ رِزْقُكُمْ وَمَا تُوعَدُونَ

And heaven is your sustenance and whatever you are promised.⁴¹

There is another verse which states that your sustenance is in the heaven and also in the earth. Allah (swt) says as in the following verse,

قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَمَّنْ يَمْلِكُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَمَنْ يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَمَنْ يُدِيرُ الْأَمْرَ فَسَيَقُولُونَ اللَّهُ- فَقُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ

Ask 'them, O Prophet', "Who provides for you from heaven and earth? Who owns 'your' hearing and sight? Who brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living? And who conducts every affair?" They will 'surely' say, "Allah." Say, "Will you not then fear 'Him'?"⁴²

So, it is clear that provision of sustenance is in the custody of Allah and he grants and distributes this provision according to His Wisdom and the social and spiritual behavior of the people.

Furthermore, with regards to exploring the resources of sustenance, it is the responsibility of Man to make the effort. Although, the provision is in the Hand of Allah and He is the Creator, humans are supposed to make serious effort in search of sustenance. As it has been made clear in the following verse as Allah (swt) says,

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ ذَلُولًا فَامْشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا وَكُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِهِ وَإِلَيْهِ النُّشُورُ

He is the One Who smoothed out the earth for you, so move about in its regions and eat from His provisions. And to Him is the resurrection of all.⁴³

Allah granted ability, power and wisdom to humans so they may cultivate the land and extract from it sustenance and be thankful to Him for His Blessings upon them. As He states in the following verse,

وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ- قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

We have indeed established you on earth and provided you with a means of livelihood. 'Yet' you seldom give any thanks.⁴⁴

The land has been stretched and made fertile and everything made useful and beneficial for Man has been placed in the land by Allah (swt). Allah (swt) says in the following verse,

⁴¹ Al-Quran 51: 22

⁴² Al-Quran 10:31

⁴³ Al-Quran 67: 15

⁴⁴ Al-Quran 7: 10

وَالْأَرْضَ مَدَدْنَاهَا وَأَلْقَيْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مَوْزُونٍ - وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ وَمَنْ لَسْتُمْ لَهُ بِرِزْقَيْنَ

As for the earth, We spread it out and placed upon it firm mountains, and caused everything to grow there in perfect balance. And We made in it means of sustenance for you and others, who you do not provide for.⁴⁵

Exploration of the land and striving for the search of sustenance is regarded as a desirable and appreciable practice in terms of the Shariah. It has been declared as seeking the bounties of Allah's Rizq, as mentioned in the Hadith of Ka'ab bin Ujrah, wherein the Messenger of Allah said,

مر على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم رجلٌ فرأى أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم من جلده ونشاطه فقالوا: يا رسول الله لو كان هذا في سبيل الله! فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: إن كان خرج يسعى على ولده صغاراً فهو في سبيل الله وإن كان خرج يسعى على أبوين شيخين كبيرين فهو في سبيل الله وإن كان خرج يسعى على نفسه يعفها فهو في سبيل الله وإن كان خرج يسعى رياءً ومفاخرةً فهو في سبيل الشيطان- (صحيح الترغيب والترهيب- ١٠٧)

A man passed by the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) and people looked at his youth and body and said if he was doing Jihad how good it was. The Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said if he is earning Halal Rizq to feed his young children or to feed his elderly parents or to protect him-self from begging then he is in Jihad, but if he wants to earn for showing off then he is in the cause of Shatin⁴⁶

Allah (swt) says that,

وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ

Some will be travelling throughout the land seeking Allah's bounty.⁴⁷

The search for Rizq (sustenance) is seeking the bounties of Allah and it has been ordained to the believers that immediately after completing their Friday prayer, they should be scattered in the land to seek the provision of Allah. Friday is very special day in Islam. The Friday prayer comes has great significance, but in spite of this, after the prayer someone has to continue his search for sustenance. Allah (swt) has made crystal clear that one should get the Rizq of Allah and be thankful to Him. Allah (swt) says as following,

⁴⁵ Al-Quran 15: 19, 20

⁴⁶ Al-Munzari,(d.656 AH) , 'Al-Targhib wa Tarhib (Riyadh: Maktabah Al-Ma'arif, 1424), SA

⁴⁷ Al-Quran 73: 20

فَإِذَا قُضِيَتِ الصَّلَاةُ فَانْتَشِرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَابْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

Once the prayer is over, disperse throughout the land and seek the bounty of Allah. And remember Allah often so you may be successful.⁴⁸

Likewise, pilgrimage to the House of Allah is a very special event in Islam. It takes place once in a year. To perform pilgrimage (Hajj) is obligatory upon those believers who have the financial and physical capability to perform it once in their lifetime. In spite of this, the believer has been granted permission to seek the provisions of life during this very sacred and special act of worship. Allah (swt) says that,

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ-فَإِذَا أَقَضْتُمْ مِّنْ عَرَفَتٍ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ عِنْدَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ

There is no blame on you for seeking the bounty of your Lord 'during this journey'. When you return from 'Arafât praise Allah near the sacred place.⁴⁹

There is another important aspect related to the provision of sustenance which is the piety and righteousness of the believers. Allah (swt) makes it conditional that if the people of the villages are pious and they have attained the character of *Taqwa* (piety), then We will open the doors of blessings from the heavens and the earth. Allah (swt) says in the verse given below as following,

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَاهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

Had the people of those societies been faithful and mindful 'of Allah', We would have overwhelmed them with blessings from heaven and earth. But they disbelieved, so We seized them for what they used to commit.⁵⁰

In one hadith we find a very interesting incident that is related with the topic of how Allah (swt) grants blessings on the basis of *Taqwa* and piety. It describes the importance of pious behavior and how if someone is using the provisions of Allah (swt), he should be thankful to Him and share this Rizq as charity with those who are economically disadvantaged. Here is the text of the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported in Sahih Muslim,

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال صلى الله عليه وسلم، ينما رجل يمشي بفلاة من الأرض فسمع صوتاً في سحابة اسقى حديقة فلان، فتلقى ذلك السحاب فأفرغ مائه

⁴⁸ Al-Quran 62: 10

⁴⁹ Al-Quran 2: 198

⁵⁰ Al-Quran 7: 96

فِي حَرَّةٍ فَإِذَا شَرْجَةٌ مِنْ تِلْكَ الشَّرَاحِ قَدْ اسْتَوْعِبَتْ ذَلِكَ الْمَاءَ كُلَّهُ، فَتَتَبِعُ الْمَاءَ فَإِذَا رَجُلٌ قَائِمٌ فِي حَدِيقَتِهِ يَحْوِلُ الْمَاءَ بِمِسْحَاتِهِ، فَقَالَ لَهُ: يَا عَبْدَ اللَّهِ، مَا اسْمُكَ؟ قَالَ: فُلَانٌ بِالْأَسْمِ الَّذِي سَمِعْتُ فِي السَّحَابَةِ، فَقَالَ لَهُ: يَا عَبْدَ اللَّهِ، لِمَ تَسْأَلُنِي عَنْ اسْمِي؟ فَقَالَ: إِنِّي سَمِعْتُ صَوْتًا فِي السَّحَابِ الَّذِي هَذَا مَأْوُهُ يَقُولُ: اسْقِ حَدِيقَةَ فُلَانٍ لِاسْمِكَ، فَمَا تَصْنَعُ فِيهَا؟ فَقَالَ: أَمَّا إِذَا قُلْتُ هَذَا فَإِنِّي أَنْظُرُ إِلَى مَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا فَأَتَصَدَّقُ بِثَلَاثِهِ، وَأَكُلُ أَنَا وَعِيَالِي ثَلَاثًا، وَأُورِدُ فِيهَا ثَلَاثَهُ (رواه مسلم- رقم ٢٩٨٤)

Abu Huraira (May Allah be pleased with him) narrates, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "A man was walking in the barren land heard voice from the cloud, 'water the garden of that man', the cloud gathered and poured all the water on the land and all the water flows like a canal to some direction, I started following the water, and then it watered the garden of a man who was standing there. I asked him what your name was and he told me the same name as I heard from the cloud. The man asked why you asked me my name. He replied I heard your name in the cloud from which this water came, water the garden of this man (your name). What do you do? He replied if you asked me this, then listen, I look what I get (provision) from this garden, I make three portions, one third I give as charity, one third I eat and my family and one third I spent on this garden."⁵¹

The above-mentioned Hadith is unequivocal evidence that the piety and righteousness of man is a significant characteristic which Allah (swt) likes and h] He decrees to provide *Rizq* in an extraordinary way. On the other hand, if humans are unthankful, mischievous, unjust and do not recognize the rights of needy and poor and those who are economically disadvantaged, then Allah (swt) takes away the blessings of sustenance and replaces it with fear, hunger and poverty. Allah (swt) has described the example of a village in the Quran, and how the people therein were enjoying prosperity and pleasure. However, when they showed thanklessness to Allah, then Allah (swt) also changed His decision. Allah (swt) says,

وَضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا قَرْيَةً كَانَتْ آمِنَةً مُطْمَئِنَّةً يَأْتِيهَا رِزْقُهَا رَغَدًا مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ فَكَفَرَتْ بِأَنْعُمِ اللَّهِ فَأَذَاقَهَا اللَّهُ لِبَاسَ الْجُوعِ وَالْخَوْفِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ

And Allah sets forth the example of a society which was safe and at ease, receiving its provision in abundance from all directions.

⁵¹ Muslim, (d. 261 AH), Hadith No. 2984; Sahih Muslim (Dar Tayyiba, 2006)

But its people met Allah's favors with ingratitude, so Allah made them taste the clutches of hunger and fear for their misdeeds.⁵²

Now the last point we have to discuss is the argument of some Muslim economists who say that in the word (قدر), meaning estimate, shows that the concept of relative scarcity is not contradictory or strange in Islamic economics. In the following paragraphs we describe the verses containing this word in different contexts. Allah (swt) says in the following verse that He has descended the water from the heaven with an estimate. It states,

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَسْكَنَتْهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَنَّا عَلَى ذَهَابٍ بِهِ لَقَدِيرُونَ

We send down rain from the sky in perfect measure, causing it to soak into the earth. And We are surely able to take it away.⁵³

In this verse Allah (swt) described the fact that He descended water in a perfect measure. It does not mean limited, it means with perfect estimate or required amount or measure i.e. however much was required, it would be sent down in the same amount. There is another verse in the same context describes the concept in more clarification. It states,

وَأَنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنَزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ

There is not any means 'of sustenance' whose reserves We do not hold, only bringing it forth in precise measure.⁵⁴

All the treasures are in the Hands and Custody of Allah (swt) and based on His eternal Wisdom and ultimate Knowledge, He decrees how much of any sustenance is required to be sent down for the relative advantage of the creation. There is another verse that describes that Allah (swt) created everything in perfect measure. It states,

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ

Indeed, We have created everything, perfectly preordained.⁵⁵

It is crystal clear from these verses that not only the treasures of sustenance but the creation of everything has been perfectly estimated and properly measured in a predetermined destiny based on the indefinite Wisdom and eternal Knowledge of Allah. The following verse also explains the same concept but in a different scenario. It states,

اللَّهُ يَغْلَمُ مَا تَحْمِلُ كُلُّ أُنْثَىٰ وَمَا تَغِيصُ الْأَرْحَامُ وَمَا تَزْدَادُ-وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ عِنْدَهُ بِمِقْدَارٍ

⁵² Al-Quran 16: 112

⁵³ Al-Quran 23: 18

⁵⁴ Al-Quran 15: 21

⁵⁵ Al-Quran 54:49

Allah knows what every female bears and what increases and decreases in the wombs and with Him everything is determined with precision.⁵⁶

The gradual increment on the pregnancy of all the expecting mothers on daily basis is not an ordinary thing. It tells us about the absolute and ultimate knowledge of the unprecedented precision of Allah's (swt) Decree. In another verse Allah (swt) has mentioned more specifically that He had distributed the provisions of life and sustenance among the people based on His Wisdom and He did not grant sustenance in extensive abundance to the people, because it could cause them to become mischievous in the land if they had plenty of provision. Allah (swt) says,

وَلَوْ بَسَطَ اللَّهُ الرِّزْقَ لِعِبَادِهِ لَبَغَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَكِنْ يُنَزِّلُ بِقَدَرٍ مَّا يَشَاءُ إِنَّهُ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ

Had Allah given abundant provisions to 'all' His servants, they would have certainly transgressed throughout the land. But He sends down whatever He wills in perfect measure. He is truly All-Aware, All-Seeing of His servants.⁵⁷

The socio-economic disparities and the differences in the level of sustenance among the people have some validity and reason behind. The wisdom behind the Decree of Allah with regards to sending provisions to His servants in a precise measure is so that they don't transgress and in the land or become mischievous in the land. Allah (swt) grants Rizq to the people in various grades so that they can acquire services from each other. The other reason is that Allah (swt) wants to test the people either by giving them a little or in abundance. So, it is a trial for all the people; he who is being patient upon limited sustenance and he who is being thankful upon abundant resources. Allah (swt) says,

أَهُمْ يَقْسِمُونَ رَحْمَتَ رَبِّكَ نَحْنُ قَسَمْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ مَعِيشَتَهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَرَفَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا سُخْرِيًّا وَرَحِمْتُ رَجُلًا خَيْرٌ مِمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ

Is it they who distribute your Lord's mercy? We 'alone' have distributed their 'very' livelihood among them in this worldly life and raised some of them in rank above others so that some may employ others in service. 'But' your Lord's mercy is far better than whatever 'wealth' they amass.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Al-Quran 13: 8

⁵⁷ Al-Quran 42: 27

⁵⁸ Al-Quran 43: 32

In this verse Allah (swt) has described the fact that He Alone distributes livelihood among the people, and He keeps some difference in their levels of livelihood so they can offer goods and services to each other and make some provisions. The following verse explains that the difference in the levels of *Rizq* is the wisdom of Allah (swt) and the purpose behind is testing the people on whether they behave nicely or badly. Allah (swt) says,

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُ لَغَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

He is the One Who has placed you as successors on earth and elevated some of you in rank over others, so He may test you with what He has given you. Surely your Lord is swift in punishment, but He is certainly All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.⁵⁹

Somebody can rightly question that when everything is in the Custody of Allah, it is He Who distributes the provisions of life and sustenance to all the creations and since piety and righteousness play a major role in the decision making of Allah (swt) and His Decree about sending down the *Rizq* for the creation, then why are believers and Muslims the most economically disadvantaged or why are the majority of Muslim countries at the bottom of the human development index or why devastating poverty and absolute hunger is the fate of many Muslim societies around the world. The great Poet of the East has given a satisfying answer wherein he says,

اپنی ملت پر قیاس اقوامِ مغرب سے نہ کر
خاص ہے ترکیب میں قومِ رسولِ ہاشمی

(Don't get your nationality from the nations of the West, Hashemi Rasool's nation is special in composition.)

In this poetic verse Dr Iqbal says that one should not judge the Muslim Ummah as a nation like disbelievers who form the nations of the West as the components and the structure of the Muslim Ummah is different. It also means that the dealing of Allah with Muslims is different as compared to disbelievers.

Allah (swt) has answer of this question in Quran. He states that His dealing with believers is different from disbelievers. In terms of Muslims, when they make mistake light torments come to them in this world so that they return back to Him, and they are saved from the more painful torment of the hereafter. But in terms of disbelievers and infidels, Allah gave them more worldly things and enjoyments for a limited time period and in the hereafter a severe painful torment of the Hellfire is waiting for them. Allah says,

⁵⁹ Al-Quran 6: 165

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْخُلُونَ بِمَا أَنَّهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ
بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ لَّهُمْ سَيُطَوَّقُونَ مَا بَخِلُوا بِهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ
وَاللَّهُ مِيرَاثُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

Do not let your eyes crave what We have allowed some of the disbelievers to enjoy; the? Fleeting? Splendor of this worldly life, which We test them with. But your Lord's provision? in the Hereafter? is far better and more lasting.⁶⁰

In another Surah, the fact has been discussed in the following way,

قُلْ تَمَتَّعْ بِكُفْرِكَ قَلِيلًا إِنَّكَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ

Enjoy your disbelief for a little while! You will certainly be one of the inmates of the Fire.”

Also ponder upon at the following verse,

وَيَوْمَ يُعْرَضُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا عَلَى النَّارِ أَلْهَبْتُمْ طَيِّبَاتِكُمْ فِي حَيَاتِكُمُ الدُّنْيَا وَاسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ
بِهَا-فَالْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ
تَفْسُقُونَ

“Watch for” the Day “when” the disbelievers will be exposed to the Fire. “They will be told,” “You “already” exhausted your “share of” pleasures during your worldly life, and “fully” enjoyed them. So today you will be rewarded with the torment of disgrace for your arrogance throughout the land with no right, and for your rebelliousness.”⁶¹

These verses describe the Tradition of Allah (swt) in that He grants more *Rizq* and distributes sustenance among disbelievers, sometimes more so than the believers. If one has a thorough and deep understanding of the Quran, then it is not difficult to comprehend that most of the time, disbelievers got more monetary resources and worldly assets since the disbelievers want to have only the worldly resources and wealth of this *Dunya*, and they don't care about the hereafter. Allah (swt) says that We give some *Rizq* to those who want only the worldly resources, but they don't have any share in the hereafter. If someone prefers to have the blessings and *Rizq* in the *Dunya* and *Akhirat*, then Allah (swt) says We respond to him by granting and blessing him in the *Dunya* and *Akherat*. But if some loves only the *Dunya* and not the *Akherat*, then we give him what he wants if he makes the effort, but there is not any reward for him in the Hereafter. The Quranic verse states that,

⁶⁰ Al-Quran 3: 180

⁶¹ Al-Quran 46: 20

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الْآخِرَةِ نَزِدْ لَهُ فِي حَرْثِهِ-وَمَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ حَرْثَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ نَصِيبٍ

Whoever desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We will increase their harvest. And whoever desires 'only' the harvest of this world, We will give them some of it, but they will have no share in the Hereafter.⁶²

When Allah (swt) grants the disbelievers more *Rizq* and enjoyment of worldly and materialistic resources and wealth, then He warns the believers to not be in illusion about their wealth and power in the land, as it is a test for them and some entertainment for a certain time period. Allah (swt) says in the following verse,

لَا يَغُرُّكَ تَقَلُّبُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي الْبِلَادِ . مَتَاعٌ قَلِيلٌ ثُمَّ مَا لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وَ بِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ
Do not be deceived by the prosperity of the disbelievers throughout the land.⁶³

In another chapter this concept has been described in the following way,

وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَى مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ-وَرِزْقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى

Do not let your eyes crave what We have allowed some of the disbelievers to enjoy; the 'fleeting' splendor of this worldly life, which We test them with. But your Lord's provision 'in the Hereafter' is far better and more lasting.⁶⁴

These verses of the Quran and quotations from the Sunnah are clear evidence that the concept of relative scarcity as described in the conventional and secular economic thought, in both capitalism and socialism, is not compatible with the doctrines and guidelines of the Islamic economic system. The foundation of the Islamic economic system is laid down on the fundamental sources of revealed knowledge in the Quran and Sunnah. The Islamic creed is that Allah (swt) is the Creator and Provider of sustenance and He distributes this provision on the basis of His Wisdom and mutual interest of the people.

6. Conclusion

In the quotations from the Quranic verses taken from numerous chapters in various contexts mentioned above, it is not difficult to conclude that resources are created and distributed by Allah and human beings are required to put effort into the exploration of these resources. The sustenance to satisfy the basic needs is guaranteed by Allah and the available resources are sufficient to fulfill the basic needs and flourishing requirements of all the creations. The worldly resources are for Muslims and Non-Muslims alike, everyone can use them to produce goods

⁶² Al-Quran 42: 20

⁶³ Al- Quran 3:196

⁶⁴ Al-Quran 20: 131

and services to satisfying their basic needs. The distribution of the sustenance among the people is purely in the Hands of Allah (swt). Sometimes, the disbelievers have got more resources and power on resources at large for their utilization and satisfaction of their materialistic desires because the worldly resources and wealth do not have much importance in the sight of Allah, and also Allah (swt) gives to the disbelievers more to test the believers. The comfort, pleasure, prosperity, power, enjoyment and occupation of resources and the abundance of wealth held by the disbelievers have always been tests for the believers. The fleeting splendor of worldly life and the conspicuous brilliance of this world is a matter of little enjoyment for the disbelievers. The resources have been sent down with a precise and exact measure, and so they are not limited but they are sufficient and in abundance to satisfy the basic needs of mankind and also other creations. It is the misuse of these resources or occupation by certain individuals, or concentration of wealth in a few hands, or unequal distribution of wealth, or many other such behaviors, like being greedy and unjust, that are the major causes of the economic problems. Otherwise, the resources are sufficient for the satisfaction of the essential requirements and basic needs of all mankind and even other creatures. So, there is no need to curtail the population for the sake economic development in the name of population welfare. Rather, there is definitely a need to change behaviors such as having a luxurious life style, inappropriate and immoral behavior, misallocating resources, wasting money on extravagant and unessential expenditures and having a voracious desire for money and worldly resources. The meaning of **قدر** (as limited resources) which some Muslim economists suggest is that the concept of relative scarcity is not alien or contradictory to Islamic economics, is a misunderstanding and not based on proper comprehension of the Quranic text in a wider context. The resources have been created by Allah (swt) in a perfect, precise and exact measure to fulfill the essentially required basic needs of humanity.