

Abul A'la Maududi and Sayyed Qutb on Revolution: A Comparative Analysis

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Revolution in terms of a change process has been subject to debate in occidental as well as in oriental intellectual and political circles alike. For instance, in the modern history, though revolution in terms of an instrument of instability was despicable to German philosopher Friedrich Hegel owing to a profound influence of Romanticism which in the wake of French Revolution, with the philosophical crutches provided by Edmond Burk and Hume overshadowed Rationalism but at the same time, he cherished the idea of revolution in terms of an agent of positive development of history on the basis of dialectics.¹ He deserves rich tributes to present a logical conflict-model of opposite ideas which he terms as thesis and anti-thesis resulting in the emergence of a new idea which is synthesis of the good qualities of thesis and anti-thesis. In other words, he viewed conflict as a positive source of historical development and a medium of transferring positive qualities from one phase of history to another meaning thereby that conflict finds justification only if it helps to develop a better system than the existing one.

If promise of a better order is imperative to justify the very genesis of a change process whether it is in the form of a conflict of ideas or a revolution, then the agents of the change process must look for a theory of change which may explain three important questions: one, what is the philosophical rationale and justification of revolution; two, what is the road-map of revolution; three, what will be the form of political structure replacing the older system. On this paradigm, this study will seek to explore the question that how far it is true that approaches towards revolution developed by Sayyed Maududi (1903-1979) and Sayyed Qutb (1906-1966) though primarily corresponding to their respective heterogeneous cultural, political and economic contexts display marked similarities on the basis of their approach towards religion as a vehicle of multi-dimensional change in the ideological context.

Rationale for Revolution:

Sayyed Maududi and Sayyed Qutb both took Islam as a state and revolutionary force more than anything else. For both of them the ultimate end of Islamic movement is to establish a state on the basis of the Divine

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sovereignty². It is for the achievement of this end that they view Islam not as set of dogmas but a religion having revolutionary character. Sayyed Maududi presented Islam as an ideology³ which aims to restructure the social order of the world according to its own principles through its believers.⁴ In 1941 he founded Jamat-e-Islami, an institutional manifestation of his ideas, to work as a revivalist party for the establishment of an ideological state⁵ embodying the spirit of Islamic law and thus distinguishable from the secular statehood.⁶ In Sayyed Maududi, we find the rationale of revolution on the following grounds: Firstly, justification of revolution may be found in his redefinition of the philosophy of Jihad structured on the basis of a dogma of Islamic state behind it⁷ which is imperative to end today's *Jahilliyah* as the Prophet (SAW) waged Jihad to counter the forces of pre-Islamic *Jahilliyah*.⁸ Secondly, as supreme objective of Islam is to establish the sovereignty of God on earth to secure His pleasure⁹ which can hardly be achieved without acquiring the state power.¹⁰ Thirdly, Jihad as an instrument of revolution guarantees the sanctity of human life in the same way as the Prophet (SAW) secured sanctity of human life by fighting against the forces of *Jahilliyah* (ignorance) which had no reverence for the human life. (Al-Mā'idah:32) The party of believers waging struggle for revolution is called *Hizbullah* (Party of God) in the Quranic terminology.¹¹ Fourthly, Islamic revolution finds justification in the face of aggressive imperialist designs of the colonial powers. He criticized all the states having imperialist tendencies including the United States, Soviet Union and India alike. Since he belonged to India and later on, migrated to Pakistan after its creation in 1947, we find detailed exposition of his criticism of Imperialism in the Indian context. For instance, he criticised the United Nations and other great powers for encouraging India not giving any heed to Kashmir dispute merely through naked use of force.¹² Moreover, in face of the Indian imperialist designs as explicit from the statements of Indian leaders not lesser than the stature of Mr Nehru, he urged the Muslim community to support the Jihadi elements in Kashmir fighting against India.¹³ Sayyed Maududi, in his endeavours to materialize the Islamic revolution joined the political process¹⁴ in Pakistan and ruled out armed conflict with the counter-revolutionary forces within the country and happened to be a reformer more than a revolutionary¹⁵ at least within Pakistan.

Similarly, Sayyed Qutb who also views Islam as a major revolutionary force developed his political philosophy to revitalize the ideological spirit of Islam vis-a-vis other social ideologies.¹⁶ He seeks to justify his theory of revolution on the following grounds: First, since

revolution is an instrument to establish an Islamic state which Islam requires to make its ideological appeal more profound and convincing as psychologically people prefer to look towards a living entity than to a theory.¹⁷ For him, primary objective of Jihad as an instrument to revolution was to establish a society on the basis of the sovereignty of God and thus to secure the liberty of a human being from the enslavement of the other.¹⁸ In this society, the authority of Law-giving would rest with God as obedience to man-made laws tantamount to worshipping the architects of those laws who represent the forces of modern *Jahilliyah* bent upon exploitation of mankind under the umbrella of either Capitalism or Socialism.¹⁹ Second, since these man-made ideologies possess tremendous material power as their power-base which the Muslims cannot compete therefore, the choice left with the Muslims is to rely upon the power of faith to stand in the face of these ideologies of oppression.²⁰ Third, it is but natural that when Muslims embark upon the road to revolution against these oppressive ideologies which are backed by such a powerful material base, they will have to face heavy resistance. Thus, in the opinion of Qutb Jihad will not be taken as defensive but a forceful tool to obliterate the oppressive political orders.⁽²¹⁾

In view of the above discussion about the efforts of both theorists to seek justification for their views of revolution it can be argued that firstly, the both took the dogma of Islamic state to justify their revolutions; secondly, they based their ideas of revolution on their anti-imperialist approaches; thirdly, they developed their philosophies of revolution to end the exploitation of the masses and the salvation of humans from the exploitation of humans. Lastly, it can be construed that neither of the two philosophers confined the dynamism of Islam to the extent of mere rituals rather they discovered within the church of Islam, a powerful spiritual force that, in the words of a western scholar of Islam, “governs the life of Muslims from cradle to grave.”⁽²²⁾

Roadmap of Revolution:

So far as road-map of revolution is concerned Sayyed Maududi outlined his scheme of revolution on the basis of the Quranic injunction which regards the enjoining of good and forbidding of evil as the very *raison d'etre* of the Muslim community. Though Sayyed Maududi was not a pluralist and did not believe in the co-existence of two or more belief systems dominating the power structure of a state but unlike Sayyed Qutb he ruled out the option of armed struggle at least within the Muslim state on the basis of six major arguments: one, in case of an armed struggle, the anti-revolutionary forces may get control of the armed forces and in this case armed clash would naturally have catastrophic effect on the

revolutionary movement. Two, even if the revolutionary forces get hold of the state machinery they would hardly be able to Islamize the society as the institutions of society would not be yet prepared for moral transformation that Islam demands and if un-Islamic legacy continues to persist even under the Islamic power structure it may disillusion the masses from Islam itself. Three, armed revolution would open gateway for a series of revolutions and counter revolutions to destabilize the society. Four, to undertake an armed revolutionary struggle one will have to organize the movement in the style of secret organizations. Since those who operate such organizations, as the type of work necessitates, they themselves turn out to be intolerant and by the time such struggle stands victorious they become even greater tyrants than the existing ones. Five, these organizations resort to violence and other immoral means to achieve their ends which Islam does not permit, thus it becomes virtually impossible for one to imagine that after assuming power they will be running the state according to the principles of Islam. Finally, revolution brought about by physical force requires perpetual use of physical force for its stability. Resultantly, one type of despotism is replaced by another.²³ Thus, Sayyed Maududi, in his endeavours to materialize the Islamic revolution joined the political process²⁴ in Pakistan and ruled out armed conflict with the opposite forces within the country and happened to be a reformer more than a revolutionary²⁵ at least within Pakistan. Moreover, he seeks to revitalize the intellectual and moral spirit of the community to materialize the Islamic revolution. Following his vision of intellectual revolution Jamat-e-Islami aims at intellectual and academic uplift of the society.

Sayyed Qutb's strategy of revolution got exposure in his book *Muālim fil tariq* (Milestones) which has invited contradictory responses from different sections of the Muslims' circles. Where it has embraced text-book status for the subsequent generations of the Islamists, its contents have also been labelled as 'signposts of anarchy' for the entire Muslim world by the liberals like Hassan Mamun, the grand Shaikh of al-Azhar.²⁶ His reflections defining the roadmap of revolution in his Quranic exegesis *Fi Dhilal Al-Quran* (In the Shadow of Quran) have strong relevance with the ideas of Ibn Qayyam as both believe Islamic absolutism to be the harbinger of human salvation from the exploitative forces.²⁷ This Islamic order aimed at the liberation of humanity will be established by a revolutionary struggle on the part of an organized and resourceful Islamic Movement (vanguard) through a gradual process. This process begins with an ideological struggle to expose the weakness of the system of *Jahilliyah* and then in the final stage through the use of physical force the *Jahilliyah*

order will be uprooted and Islamic system will be installed.⁽²⁸⁾ He further argues that since the *Jahilliyah* system has strong material and military base at its back, therefore, it will be oversimplification to presume that Islamic movement will achieve its goal of replacing the *Jahilliyah* order with the Islamic one without facing stiff resistance. Therefore, as history suggests Islamic movement would not be able to achieve their goal only through preaching, devoid of physical force.⁽²⁹⁾

However, Qutb's opposition of the western Imperial forces which he terms as forces of *Jahilliyah* and his advocacy of the use of physical force as an ultimate option once all other peaceful options are exhausted to replace it with the Islamic order may be better understood if we take into account the context of his intellectual development. During the course of his intellectual development the following three events left profound imprints upon his ideas: One, the fervour with which the news of the assassination of Hassan al Banna was welcomed in the United States; two, during his visit to the United States he was shocked by the materialism, racism and sexual liberty of the American society and three, harsh treatment meted out to him during his eleven years long imprisonment at the hands of the Egyptian government. All these events had a cumulative effect on developing an acute opposition against the Imperialist forces and the Muslim rulers following the Imperialist agenda.⁽³⁰⁾

So far as, the revolutionary strategy devised by both theorists under discussion is concerned though Sayyed Maududi and Sayyed Qutb, though both represent fundamentalist stream of the Sunn'ite Islam but their roadmaps to the establishment of a model Islamic state, may be owing to their respective political realities, despite having marked similarities are characterized by some differences as well. For instance, as have been said earlier Sayyed Maududi in his endeavours to bring about Islamic revolution preferred to become part of the existing political order and Jamat-e-Islami participated actively in many state elections in Pakistan. He ruled out the option of use of force as an instrument of change at least within Pakistan where as Sayyed Qutb retained the option of armed struggle through his 'vanguard' once all other peaceful options are exhausted.⁽³¹⁾

Nature of Political Order:

So far as the philosophical construction of idea of the form of political order which was to replace the existing order as result of revolution is concerned Sayyed Maududi discovered a new term 'Theo-Democracy' which connotes that under the Divine sovereignty people will exercise limited popular sovereignty not as repository of power but as viceroys of God on earth.³² Some critics argue that since in his Theo-Democratic state

authority to interpret the political ideology of Islam vests with the clergy, hence, this Theo-democracy would turn into “Modern Theocracy”.³³ This hypothetical piece of argument can be easily discredited by making a reference to the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan which was promulgated by consensus of all political parties including Jamat-e-Islami under the leadership of Sayyed Maududi himself. This constitution recognises the sovereignty of God but does not ascribe any exclusive leverage to the clergy in Pakistan.

Moreover, Sayyed Maududi’s philosophy is not limited to the boundaries of his nationality rather his philosophy of revolution transcends all territorial boundaries. According to his philosophy of revolution all political orders not based upon the principles of Islam are exploitative therefore they must be replaced by the Islamic order³⁴ to secure human salvation and then at the individual level Quranic principle of “There shall be no compulsion in the matters of religion” (Al-Baqarah:256) will be applied. Sayyed Maududi highlighted the universal character of his philosophy of revolution when he says that the ultimate goal of Islam is to establish a world state.⁽³⁵⁾

Though Sayyed Qutb did not present any concrete philosophical edifice of Islamic state which will replace the *Jahilliyah* through revolutionary struggle but he stood for an endless and perpetual universal revolution. His philosophy of revolution bears strong relevance with Sayyed Maududi but at the same time as have been said earlier, impact of his own physical context also went a long way in restructuring his political ideas.

Conclusion:

To sum up following six broad conclusions may be drawn: First, both of them used the dogma of Islamic state to justify their approach towards revolution. Second, their philosophies of revolution are to a large extent reaction of western Imperialism. Third, their philosophies of revolution are universal in character. Fourth, Sayyed Qutb followed Maududi’s interpretation of Jihad against the forces of ignorance; thus, it can be argued that Ibn Taimiyyah’s philosophy of revolution against invalid Muslim rulers still finds intellectual spirit in modern Sunni’te philosophers. Last but not the least, Sayyed Maududi ruled out option of the use of physical force to bring about revolution in an Islamic state but Sayyed Qutb retaining this option to be used as a last resort by his ‘vanguard’ provided a ground for the subsequent Egyptian stock of the Islamists to develop ‘nearer enemy doctrine’ against those who happen to collaborate with the forces of unbelief.

References

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- 2 For many Islam as a state system can be used as progressive or retrogressive instrument to achieve the desired objectives. For details see, Muhammad Ayub, "Two Faces of Political Islam: Iran and Pakistan Compared." *Asian Survey* 19, no. 16 (June 1979): 535-546.
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- 6 Charles, J. Smith, "The Ideology of Mawlana Mawdudi." In *South Asian Politics and Religion*, by Donald E. Smith, 371-397. Princeton, 1966.
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- 13 *Ibid.*,
- 14 Jamat-e-Islami has been participating actively in Pakistani Politics and has been part of coalitions in Pakistani politics as well.
- 15 Revolutionaries follow different approach from the reformers in the sense that they view change as impossible in the existing phenomenon until and unless the power structure of the existing order is done away with altogether. For details see Paul B. Horton and Chester L. Hunt, *Sociology*, (Singapore, 1984), pp.502-3
- 16 Ibrahim M. Abu- Rabi, *Intellectual Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*. Albanay: State University of New York Press, 1966. P.129

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- 17 Syed Qutb, “*Muālim fil tariq*” (Milestones), Globusz Publishing, New York, <http://www.globusz.com/ebooks/Milestone/index.htm> (accessed October 30, 2008)
 - 18 *Ibid.*
 - 19 *Ibid.*
 - 20 *Ibid.*
 - 21 Syed Qutb while arguing against those who regard Jihad as defensive war, raised very important question in *Muālim fil tariq* when he says, ‘Can one say that if the pious caliphs had been satisfied that Roman and Persian empires were not going to attack the Arabian peninsula, they would not have striven to spread the message of Islam throughout the world. How could this message have spread when it faced with such material obstacles as political system of state, socio-economic system based on races and classes and behind all these, the military power’.
 - 22 W.Dietl, *Holy War* (1984) pp.13-47 quoted in Noor Muhammad, “The Doctrine of Jihad: An Introduction” in *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol.3, No.2 (1985), pp.381-397
 - 23 Abul Al’a Maududi, Interview by The Muslim London: (Newspaper) vol.VI, (February 1967)
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 - 28 Syed Qutb, *Muālim fil tariq*
 - 29 *Ibid.*, Also see Syed Qutb, "Jihad in the Cause of Allah." In *Contemporary Debates in Islam: An Anthology of Modernist and Fundamentalist Thought*, by Mansoor& Talattof, Kamran Moaddel, 225-226. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006
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