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SOCIAL EVOLUTION IN ISLAM

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Abstract

Sociology is a systematic study of human relations at social Level. It is a vast concept used to determine the relation of human beings at individual and community level. It includes social interaction accommodation and progress at reasonable levels. Sociologists examine the ways in which social structures and institutions such as class, family, community, power and social problems influence society are dealt with. The evolutionary trend at every step of life helps to accept all changes necessary for human development and prosperity on ethical grounds. The study of society was long known with broad evolutionary reconstructions of historical change in societies. It is a synthesizing field that attempted to integrate the findings acquired from other social sciences. Islam has unique social system and believes in progressive change and help to develop society from nomadic life to international affairs. This change has been possible through many ways for which different terms like Tashakur, Tashkeer, Tafakur etc. were used in Islamic history which are derived from the Quran. An attempt has been made to high light these terms and their impact upon Islamic social evolutionary thought and is explained according to the true nature of evolutionary change and social development.

Key words: Islamic Intellectuals, Traditional Society, Evolutionary process, Tafakur, Tadabur, western challenges.

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Introduction

The contribution of Islam to world civilization is undeniable, however from last one hundred years Muslims have been facing all the effects and ramifications of modernity, caused by the emergence of global capitalism. What does modernity ultimately mean for Muslims, and how will the historical precepts of Islam meet with changes in globalized world. The crisis of the modernization process at social level ushered the creation of a new kind of intellectual class in Muslim scholarship, which

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is distinguished by their Islamist stance and rhetoric's in contrast to the western secular and leftist intellectual elite. This is the motivation for present study, which aims to analyse and explain the evolution of Islamic society and its challenges. The beliefs of Muslim or Islamist intellectuals in this regard since the 1980s to the present in contemporary era provide a wide range of answers to the social issues. Sociologists, influenced by the teachings of Quran within the Islamic elite are reclaiming and redefining social values in Islam by demonstrating their Muslim identity in a distinctive way unparalleled throughout the world history as a reaction to the ideology and its assignment of modernization particularly Westernization. (Sena Karasipahi, 2009). The inherent peculiarities and paradoxes of modern societies and the subsequent breakdown of its reliability and legitimacy, constitute the main basis for the Muslim intellectuals critical discourse. They are all influential with their novel understanding of Islam, who perceive Islam not as an alternative but the only and single solution to the social problems. In elaboration, unlike the thinkers of the 19th century some conservative Muslim intellectuals of the mid 20th century, they try to formulate the answer of Islam to the modern sociology in non-pragmatic way. To date, most of the scholars on Islam have tried to understand Muslim Societies from historical observation alone, but does not allow unearthing of entire transformation that has taken place in Muslim societies from earlier period.

The crisis that Muslim Societies is facing is multi-dimensional in nature embracing social, economic, psychological and educational domains. (Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, 1982) These crises along with the condition of contemporary Muslim Societies have projected a wrong impression about Islam in the minds of non-Muslims more especially western thinkers which resulted generally in prejudice, hatred and biased views about Islam. They made up their mind that Islam is against social evolution so declared it main cause of the Muslim backwardness. The myth was created by some Orientalists purposefully to distort Islamic teachings. According to Prof. Clark;

“Islam saw God but not man, saw the claims of deity but not the rights of humanity, saw authority but failed to see freedom, therefore hardened into despotism, stiffened into formalism, sink into death”.(A.S.N. Wadia (n.d.)

This approach influenced many thinkers who were unable to understand the concept and vitality of change expressed in Islam. They believe that Islam is by tradition a bound system, having no taste of change, so society needs to put off the Islamic yoke and work for the development of the society on western lines. They believe Islam must be brought in

close contact with western societies for the development and progress in order to make it relevant with possibilities of modern life style. (Syid Qutb Shaheed, 1953) If anything in religion is variant with modernity it should be explained away or discarded as obsolete. (Maryam Jameelah, 1981) Weber argued that, "while the Protestant Ethic believe in economic development and worked for the development of Modern capitalism, the Islamic Society lack autonomous cities, bourgeois class and political stability because of predominant feudalism and patriarchal bureaucracy and provide less incentive for the scientific and intellectual inquiry". (Hizam M. Al mataharia16:4,) Weber's characterization of Islam has been criticized as "factually wrong" and declared as bourgeois style of life and religious sobriety and asceticism which is result of Judeo-Protestant ethnocentrism. (Ernest Gellner, 1993, , Turner Bryan, 1974,) Another subjective approach about Islam was put forth by Wilfred Cantwell Smith who says;

"No great insight to recognize that the Middle East today is an area where the former way of life is falling apart without a satisfactory substitute having yet made its appearance. It is more difficult to draw positive conclusions as to the cause of this deterioration. Faced with the necessity of quickly and decisively evolving a new social, economic and political pattern, the educated classes in the Middle East have so far shown themselves almost totally inadequate to the task. Accustomed to believe that their way of life was inherently superior to that of any other religious or racial group, they have been unable to grasp the fact that this way of life has failed to modern challenges of life. Refusing to acknowledge where they themselves have failed, they have fallen in to the pitfall of blaming others, in this case, the West" (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 1954).

Claims very powerfully put forth by the Western scholars stand at their foot true that Islamic society is static and the main cause of Muslim failure to meet modern challenges when judged by the rod developed for judging Christianity and Judaism. But pragmatic approach and social science methodology helps to understand that Islam advocates for progressive change and laid total responsibility up on human mind to work for social development. Islam is a way of life always at forefront to accept change as positive sign within its moral and ethical code of conduct. Islamic life cycle pays way to accommodate every good thing based on moral, scientific and spiritual instinct. It satisfies the human beings spiritual as well as material needs and directs them to acknowledge possessions of the earth as the Quran says;

“But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allāh loves not those who do mischief” (Al – Quran; 28:77)

The cultural degradation of pre-Islamic Arabia is not hidden anymore. Their crimes have created chaos and disorder in the Arabia but after the revelation of Islam, society was molded on new lines for the safety and security of people. It changed the scattered lives of the Arabs and engineered social cohesion. It ushered impact on other societies after crossing the borders of the Arab world. Besides this, Islam transformed social, political and economic life on ethical and moral lines. According to Mehdi Abedi and Gray Legenhausen, “it has been revealed to reform the human society”. (Mehdi ‘Abedi and Gary Legenhausen (ed), 1986), Human beings are the fundamental factors in Social evolution and are themselves responsible for both development and decline at their respective times by using freedom and intellect. (Ali Shari’ati, 1979) Most of the verses of the holy Quran are directed towards implementing change and transformation of society which is implemented by the Prophet Muhammad during his life time. (Muhammad Mumtaz ‘Ali, 1992)

The absolute teachings of Islam direct towards social change for the betterment of the society, all changes and developments of the society are directly proportional to the fixed and immutable laws. (Ali Shari’ati, 1979) Keeping in view the concept of change Islamic laws or teachings are based on two types of provisions, first category talks about the basic principles and are not subject to change. They are neither affected by time nor place of occurrence such as worship. Second category is subsidiary and is bound to change according to prevailing circumstance of an area or a place. This category of provisions is related to suit or work in consonance with the lives of people of an area. Here the method of ijthihad by a competent authority is a necessary tool to formulate the regulations according to changing circumstances. (Muāammad Sallām, Madhkūr, 1987)

Many Muslim thinkers and scholars tried to find the cause behind the backwardness of the Muslim Ummah. They realized that the Western scholars or Muslim thinkers (influenced by western ideology of “Things Changed”) need a positive response from the Islamic block and devised a new term of “Things changed to Change things”. Among these scholars the role of International Institute of Islamic Thought is very prominent and understandable. (Ziauddin Sardar, n.d.) Muslim scholars later on divided the causes into two major categories;

External cause which forced Muslim community for stagnation is Western imperialism who for a very long time devised Muslim laws, educational system, controlled their resources and let down their revival. They were forced to resign from offices and were pulled down to economic disaster. (Isma'il R. al-Faruqi and'Abdul Hamid Abâ Sulayman, 1993)

The other cause is internal related to historical decline of Muslim culture due to internal rivalry and plots in the courts of the Muslim kings. According to Malik Ben Nabi, "if the Muslim culture had been in a position to produce the type of society desired by Quran which could stand economically and muster the military might, colonialism would have not been possible". (Malek Ben Nabi, 1988) For him the external cause is the direct cause of cultural rivalry and working of Muslim for their individual interests and leaving behind the collective cause of progress and development of Muslim society. The other group of scholars among whom Abdul Hamid Abu Sulaiman and Ismail al-Faruqi belongs is of the opinion, that the cause of Muslim backwardness is the melancholy of their thought and method. (Ismail R. al-Faruqi and'Abdul Hamid Abâ Sulayman,, 1993) Moreover, a real thinker of Islamic ideology Sayid Qutb Shaheed acknowledged that the cause of Muslims decline is that their societies everywhere have buckled down low on morality and dedication to the Islamic worldview. (William E Shepard, 2003)

In addition to above mentioned factors the other causes of Muslim backwardness are lack of practice of the Islamic principles of Tazkiyah, Islah, Jihad and Ijtihad in all aspects of life. These principles play momentous role in bringing about revolutionary change in both fabrics the individual and collective life. Early Muslims utilized these principles from Prophetic period up to 12th century and gained high status in the whole world. It is accepted universally that evolution is natural, inevitable and is a necessary phenomenon. This transformation gave an edge to Muslims due to which it emerged as the progressive community. The phenomenon of change is natural and helps to understand the nature's inclusion and exclusion of the things as per their need and necessity. However, the importance of change and its powerful effect on the lives of people has been explained in different ways as cyclical and evolutionary processes. It is noteworthy that change occurs due to conflict between two or more groups. Different dimensions of change occupy the attention of sociologists, with the aim of understand nature of the change.

While explaining the nature of the change, sociologists put forth different opinions which paved way for further research. Religious scholars put their ideas and thought in more pregnant way than modern sociologist. These differences rely on the ideology of each thinker and the theories put forth by western sociologists are clearly materialistic in nature and character. (Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, 1992, Steven Pfaff, 2007) They devise these theories, to oppose religion and emphasized that religion is irrelevant to the modern days of life. (Grace Davie, 1994, 39) But Muslim thinkers draft their sociological theories to support spiritual, moral and religion bound material way of life and impressed and indicated the direction a society must take if it has to survive long. Their thought of evolutionary change depends upon the unique vision of Islam whose total philosophy of life cycle revolves around the unity of faith (Tawhid). Therefore the evolutionary change presented by Muslim thinkers have base in religion and advocates the necessity of change in accordance with Shari'ah requirements in human societies. Therefore, the main objective of change in Islam is to affirm and realise the unity of Allah in all spheres of human life. It is this thought which forced Jaffar Shaikh Idris, the first Muslim thinker, who assailed the cultural bias of western social scientists and invited Muslim thinkers to bring the perspective of Islam within their professional and academic domains and work towards the evolution of Islamic Sciences. According to him the base of their approaches is tawhidic in nature which differentiates them from other social scientists. (Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, 1992) A gigantic question is what is to change in relation to westerns theory of change? Hence, Islam asserts that everything cannot be subject to change such as Hudud laws in contrast to the Western social institutions where everything is subjected to change even the concept of God and religion. The change in Islam goes in one of three directions, deviation from the absolute, parallel to the Absolute or return towards the Absolute. (Dawud Rosser-Owen, 1975) In Islamic society change takes place at different levels from individual to universal level. The reason is that individuals are the active agents of change. Any change at individual level will cause subsequent change at all other levels. So in Case of Individual, Islam emphasizes to change their being their consciousness, their attitude, motivations and morality on spiritual lines as mentioned in the Quran

“Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change their condition themselves” (Al_Quran, 13:11)

For these changes, planning is necessary and must be well organized so as to achieve more effective results. A single Qur'anic contribution is that everything in this world changes in stages. For it human beings need to take certain steps.

- Acquire proper and appropriate knowledge
- Proper thinking
- Change or reform approach
- Worship regularly
- Adjust activities constantly in consonance with Islam
- Establish good relations with others

These stages can be taken from the Qur'anic and Sunn'ah point of view. "It is He who has sent among the unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs to sanctify them and to instruct them in scripture and wisdom." (Al-Quran: 62:2)

Muhammad Jamal al-Din al-Qasma opines, "After attaining a perfect thought the holy Quran and Hikmah guides them to achieve purification which involves both the intellectual and the functional aspect of life". (Muhammad Jamal al-Din al-Qasma,,n.d.) Evolution is a continuous process and is called renewal (tajdeed) while as Islam rejects the temporal change and Allah condemn those having occasional stance and declares it as a characteristics of hypocrites. (Al- Quran, 17:67) So it is clear that people will not change their attitude and do not waste their time, except for the proper progression of themselves and their society (Amr Khalid,Qiymat al Waqt; <http://www.amrkald.net> April 1, 2003)

Western sociologists differ in their opinion/thought about what should be changed in a society. According to C. Wright Mills that "change occurs in group relations and activities of a society", while Judson R. Landis says, "Change should be limited", Morris Ginsberg says, "Change must be brought in the structure of a society". Ronald Edari emphasized "change should be brought in structure as well as in relationships in society". Harry M. Jhonson vehemently said that change should be brought in structure and function of a society as well as other contributive factors of the society. (Steven Vago, 1999) Social change in Islam depends upon the individuals' relationship with universe under the guiding principles of Shari'ah. Elements which help to synthesis change are Tazkiyah, Tafakur, Islah, Taskheer and Tajahdud. Change in Islamic society is directed by the process of acquired knowledge, inductive and deductive logic through these elements. Knowledge is the only tool and process which helps to make social change possible i.e., from stagnation to higher ranks of development. The sources of change in Islam are the divine guidance (al-Quran) and the reason which initiates the technical and scientific temper among the members of the society. (Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, 1984) Change initiates from individual and brings revolution in the society. For individual reform, Tazkiyah-Nafs is the first step for the progress in a well to do manner. This process of purification helps to

move step by step from lower stratum of being Muslim to higher ones i.e. Mumin then to Muhsin. Being vicegerent of Allah man has to work to bring society back from lavish material desire to welfare (Muhsin) way of serving. (Ahmad Farid,,6) According to Bernard Lewis, "Tazkiyah is an effort directed upon oneself for the attainment of moral and religious perfections" (Bernard Lewis and others 1991)

Purification of the soul will help to change the innate nature of a person and it becomes incumbent to drive mind (aql) to go for the required change in the society which can be achieved through the process of Tafakkur. Tafakkur is a process of deep thinking or it can be called as an intellectual effort. This is possible only by strengthen human belief in God in order to accomplish worldly as well as spiritual happiness. An individual is encumbered with great qualities and can bring the society and individual together for causative environment. (K. G. Saiyidain, 1963) By learning the natural and revealed norms and patterns human beings can plan and lay foundation of better future for the individual and society. (Ali shari'ati, 1979, 52) All these improvements are accomplished by performing Islah This term in modern Arabic language is used to reform society intellectually by commanding good and forbidding evil.(Bernard Lewis et.at, 1991) At contemporary era Muslim must take lead to guide logically all other societies how to remain away from evil and corrupt practices. The implication of Islah cum falah concept helps Muslims to achieve the God and is entitled as khair ummat,

"You are the best of nations, evolved for the mankind, enjoying what is right forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah" (Al-Quran; 5:78-79) Muslim community is evolved for the reform of mankind, for this purpose they need to prepare and endow them-selves by the methodology necessary for the said cause in order to defend humanity from all evil practices and belligerence. (Gray Legenhausen (ed.), 1986) Muslim community at present is facing the worst challenge of Scienticism. In order to overcome scientific challenge Muslim community must develop the taste of advancement in the said field as it did in the medieval period. In the scientific field Muslim must need to develop theories which may help them to overcome the lavish desires of the worldly affairs. Taskheer is necessary to change the society from material desires to moral and ethical doings. All the elements which exist in the universe have been created for the welfare of the mankind or usufruct of the people. In the current techno centric world Muslims need to apply reason to develop new methodologies in order to invent new things from the existing ones. The deductive methodology can be extracted from the Qur'anic verses as,

.....and we sent down Iron, in which is great might as well as many benefits for the mankind....” (Al-Quran: 48:25)

Scientific developments created new challenges for the humanity in general but for Muslims in particular. Scientific epoch lack moral principles in every field of life and new problems were created which need to be solved according to shari'ah. These problem need to be analyzed and revisited by the process of ijtihad which is an intellectual endeavor. (Muhammad Ibrahim Jannati 2003) According to Taha jabir al-Alwani, “It is like a methodology for thought that allows the Muslim’s mind to participate in an intellectual Jihad. This jihad aims to generate ideas, and build a new Muslim identity, mentality and personality. (Taha Jabir Alwani, 1993) Al-Ghazali reported his internal struggle and the religious solution to the problems of the Muslim society and finally achieved in *The Deliverance from Error*, a work that has been compared to *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. In the revival of the religious sciences he presented his unified view of religion incorporating elements from all three sources: tradition, intellectualism, and mysticism. (Al-Ghazzali, *Encyclopedia Encarta*, 2002) Dawud Rosser Owen called it progressive Dimension. (Dawud Rosser Owen, 1975, 20)

Conclusion

All the above views, suggestions and thought from Shariah and Muslim scholars predict that the change in the society is inevitable and is neither possible through unethical means nor at individual grudge. It is a collective effort of Muslim community where the traditionalists, Modernists and the persons having mystic experience need to join their hands and heads to build the society on the modern lines to achieve falah and behave as a vibrant society to bring humanity on the track of realism and pragmatism. Modern society is going from positive to negative change and wishes to cross the ethical precincts of life.

The result of such mentality is creating chaos and disturbance in the society and forced a good number of people to moral degradation and corruption which concludes on the snatching standard life rights of plebeian section of the society. If Muslim have desire to serve again as the principal society, Muslim scholarship need to revisit the intellectual sphere and bring necessary changes in the mind set of western societies who are heading towards disaster which seems backward and which slack to serve at international level. Recognizing that each level often explains only a particular aspect of Muslim society would certainly prevent the occurrence of what might be termed an ecological fallacy and so enrich the discipline of Islamic studies. It is actually the principle

of movement which keeps the 'Muslim society in harmony with new trends of life within the broad frame work of the Islamic teachings.

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