DEVELOPING HUMAN CONSCIENCE ON THE BASIS OF FAITH (IMAN): SAYYID QUTB’S (1906-1966) APPROACHES FOR SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

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ABSTRACT

In the context of modern day, issues of social solidarity and wealth redistribution become matters of great concern to the world due to lack of moral conducts within human society in which lead to injustice to happen. Thus co-operation of individuals and their society towards achieving peace and harmony is part of social justice realization. While Islam laid down certain rules and responsibilities on individual and society of mutual social care, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) has detailed out the Islamic conception together with his views and approaches towards establishing the basis of social solidarity among members of society including role of inner dimension or faith (iman) as the most important element in establishing feelings of love and mercy in the human conscience towards other members of the community. This paper discusses Qutb’s views on social solidarity and its pre requisites as manifested in his writings, Fi Zilal al-Quran and other works. Using content analysis technique and secondary data analysis, the study works and analyses Qutb’s ideas and thought in regards to social solidarity that appear in his writings particularly his Fi Zilal al-Quran. Other secondary data related to Qutb’s thought are also taken into account in order to have a clear worldview about the latter arguments. Result of the study shows that Qutb’s conception of social solidarity was in parallel with Islamic teachings. His emphasis on faith (iman) as the most important element in establishing feelings of love and mercy in the human conscience was in line with some other classical scholar’s perspectives believing that the establishment of social solidarity became one of the solutions in solving Muslim social, political and economic disparities facing Muslims.

Key words: Sayyid Qutb, Social Solidarity, Islam
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1. INTRODUCTION

Any discussion on social justice is incomplete without dealing with the co-operation between individuals and society to achieve peace and harmony. Therefore, Islam laid certain responsibilities on individuals and society of mutual social care or social solidarity (al-takafal al-ijtima’i), the principles of which were mercy, love and unselfishness. In general, modern Muslim scholars viewed social solidarity as a social concept because it required co-operation between all members of society, whether individuals, groups, rulers or the ruled. All members were responsible for helping one another to promote the common welfare and prosperity of their society irrespective of their differences in sex, class and so on. In the context of modern day, issues of social solidarity and wealth redistribution become matters of great concern to the world due to lack of moral conducts within human society in which lead to injustice (Rania Kamla Hussain G. Rammal, 2013; Jost, J. T., & Kay, A. C., 2010; George Theoharis, 2007; Gelissen, W. A., John., 2001). While the social system of Islam is based upon sound principles, which are designed to secure happiness and prosperity for both individual and society (Hayatullah Laluddin, 2014), Western scholars (Gelissen, 2001, Jost, J. T., & Kay, A. C. 2010, George Theoharis 2007) argue that societal solidarity increases the more the ‘strong’ support the ‘weak’, and the more both the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ contribute to the general interest in which lead to three overarching principles of distributive justice namely; (1) equity: (2) equality: (3) need. Considering both Muslims and Western views, this paper discusses social solidarity and its concept from Sayyid Qutb’s points of view whose idea of Islamic worldview and approaches representing the twentieth century Muslim thoughts.

2. METHODS

This paper will discuss Qutb’s views and approaches for social solidarity by looking into his discussions as manifested in his writings such as Fi Zilal al-Quran and other works. Using secondary data analysis and a content analysis technique, the study analyses Qutb’s ideas and thought in regards to social solidarity that appear in his writings particularly his Fi Zilal al-Quran. Other secondary data such as books, journal articles discussing and commenting on Qutb’s thought are also taken into account in order to have a clear picture about the latter arguments. All the data are analysed according to the selected themes and elaborated in line with the study objectives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Social Solidarity Embraces Human Social Life

According to Qutb, social solidarity was not limited to the relationship and co-operation between individuals and society. Rather, it embraced all aspects of human social life, including that of responsibility between the individual and his or her personal conscience, between the individual and his or her family, between the individual and other members of the community and between the nation (umma) and other nations. Only those inspired by faith (iman) could appreciate the significance of this mutual social responsibility of helping their fellow men and women, which led to social justice. Qutb’s discussion on the role of faith as a driving force in influencing individual character toward a goodness and kindness to other fellow men can be seen in the followings of his master piece work Fi Zilal al-Quran (1992),
1:442–445; 2:773–775; 6:3964–3970; and 5:2822–2823. That is why the Qur’an Qutb argues, while stressing the nature of mutual social responsibility, always began with “those who believe…” (alladhina amanu) to highlight how good moral conduct was characteristic of Muslim believers (Quran: 1:177, 49:10, 5:2, 3:102-103). In other words, those who commit tyranny and oppression towards others are in the stage of their faith (Iman) being disputed.

The role of faith (iman) Qutb argues, also includes controlling the natural instinct (al-muyul al-fitriyya) of the human soul so that it will respond in accordance with the Shari’a of God. For human social life, this natural instinct works in parallel with human nature and societal needs. According to Qutb, the division of wealth according to the Islamic law of inheritance clearly showed how Islam took into particular consideration human natural instincts. Feelings of love and compassion for his own family, for instance, would make a father put maximum effort into his work, since he knew that the fruit of his efforts would continue to benefit his children and grandchildren (Qutb, 1992, 1:587). In this context, the Quran already laid down clear rules that are essentially simple if correctly applied and, above all, the inheritance laws in the Quran are clearly stated in chapter 2, Al-Baqarah and chapter 4, An-Nisaa'; a total of fourteen verses. There are several other verses that relate indirectly to inheritance such as verses 106 through 108 in chapter 5, Al-Mai’dah, which dictate that the Will be witnessed by two witnesses and sets out the qualifications of those witnesses.

On the other hand, a natural instinct which was not imbued with faith (iman) and a feeling of direct contact with God would be easily defeated and influenced by evil desire (al-hawa). Faith was the only means of resistance. If people could protect their souls from evil desires, they would be regarded as successful in life. If they failed, that is, the evil desire managed to take control of their thoughts and everyday actions, they would be among those who became lost on their way to God. As the Qur’an stated: “Whosoever is guided, is only guided to his own gain, and whosoever goes astray, it is only to his own loss: thou art not a guardian over them.” (Quran, 39:41).

3.2. Controlling Own Soul Prior to Guiding other Members to the Right Path

The responsibility of individuals towards themselves was to control and guide their souls and call them to account when they went astray. According to Qutb, this was the first task for a true believer, before he tried to guide members of their families and society to the path of God (Qutb, 1992, 6:3615) Qutb described this as a huge task in human life, since people were struggling against the enemy (evil desire) within their own bodies. There was no other force driving people to destruction with its strong impulse towards tyranny and wrongdoing (Qutb, 1992, 2:776-777).

Islam is a religion that takes account of all aspects of human life, including personal, social, economic and political relationships between people. It legislates that such relationships are to be conducted in accordance with God’s command. In this regard, Islam does not allow its members to live in isolation from other people. A Muslim who believes in God and in what has been sent down through His Prophet is required to communicate with the people around him. He has to be sensitive to what happens to other members of his society. Qutb notes, before an individual Muslim looked at the outside world, he had to look first into his own family, because the family itself constituted the foundation of society as a whole and became the first preparation for a man before taking a part in the outside world (Qutb, 1992, 6:3615, 2: 650).

3.3. Role of Family towards Social Solidarity

A man’s responsibility towards his family, as described earlier, meant that he must protect all his family members from deviating from God’s path. Qutb quoted verse 6 of Sura 66 (al-
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Tahrim) saying that, “O you who believe! Ward off yourselves and your families against a Fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones.”(Quran, 66:6). Though the verse specifically referred to men as the heads of families who were responsible for their families’ welfare, Qutb maintained that women also had a significant role in assisting their husbands towards creating a family life based on Islamic principles. Qutb realized that choosing a good partner in life was also vital, because it would help towards educating members of the family onto the path to God, since both spouses already knew their role and task in family life (Qutb, 1992, 6:3615).

Qutb also pointed out that family harmony could be established when both the husband and wife were prepared to help each other and bear any marital responsibility. This cooperation should, however, be based on a just distribution of tasks so that both husband and wife could perform their responsibilities according to their capacities as created by God. It is therefore appropriate for the woman, who was biologically created with feelings of love and compassion, to look after the children and educate them to be a good Muslims. The man, who was biologically created by God with strength and toughness, was therefore suited to look after his wife and children and administer the family’s life as a whole (Qutb, 1992, 2:650-651).

Mutual responsibility between the individual and his family also includes a kind relationship between children and parents. In the following verse, the Qur’an is clearly ordering a Muslim to show respect to his parents:

And to be good to parents, whether one or both of them attains old age with thee: say not to them “Fie”, nor chide them, but speak to them respectful words, and lower to them the wing of humbleness out of mercy and say, “My Lord, have mercy upon them, as they raised me up when I was little.”(Quran, 17:23-24)

Interpreting this verse, Qutb again stressed that treating parents with respect indicated a person’s faith in God. This was because once faith occupied the heart, it must be followed by social and individual responsibilities that needed to be upheld by the believer, among which was respect for parents (Qutb, 1992, 4:2221). Moreover, showing respect for parents was a continuum of family life, for the children were repaying the sacrifice made by their parents in rearing them. It was not the repayment of wealth or money to the parents that Islam looked for, but love, mercy and compassion.

Qutb realized that respect for parents should begin when the children were still young age. Parents should first implant in their children the seeds of faith (iman) and show their compassion and love for them. By so doing, the children would grow up in a harmonious environment based on a strong belief in God. They would benefit from their parents’ righteousness and inherit it in turn. Qutb’s view of modern society, however, was that modern life itself made people look and think ahead and not backwards. In family life, people preferred to focus on the welfare of their wives and children instead of looking after their own parents, thus ignoring the latter. Therefore, it was only with a proper religious education implanted in children’s minds that the relationship between children and parents could be strengthened. For children to become good Muslims, Qutb maintained, benefited not only the parents but also the whole of society and generations to come,(Qutb, 1992, 4:2221).

Here one can see how Qutb linked personal desire and soul, the family’s development with that of the community stability and harmony. In his view, a good family was not one living in isolation from the outside world but one that contributed to producing a good human personality (al-unsur al-insani), which became one of the community’s members.(Qutb, 1992, 2:650).

Turning to solidarity between individuals and Muslim society, Qutb linked its existence to a body. If one member were afflicted, the rest of the members also suffered. To support this
point, he cited the Prophet’s statement: “In their mutual love, compassion and sympathy, the believers are like the body: if one member suffers the rest of the body responds with it in sleeplessness and fever.” (Qutb, 1992, 1:209).

3.4. Brotherhood Concept and Respect for others

The co-operation and solidarity among Muslims, whom the Qur’an described as “brothers” (ikhwan or ikhwah) (Quran, 49:10) derived from a feeling within the soul that one was walking along the path to God (sunnatul Allah). Therefore, one believed that whatever good deed one was doing was for the sake of God and not for other worldly rewards (Qutb, 1992, 1:208). This was the criterion that distinguished Muslims from unbelievers, since the first was founded on ‘aqida, which assembled all Muslims under one belief, irrespective of their race, culture and language, whereas the unbelievers had no divine elements in a true sense (Qutb, 1992, 1:209, 1:447–448).

Muslims’ responsibility towards other members of society also included showing respect for them and avoiding negative attitudes such as suspecting and slandering other people. These attitudes, besides lowering a person’s integrity and respect, also destroyed the whole of society itself since its members no longer felt mutual trust and respect. That is why Islam, according to Qutb, prohibited such attitudes, so that a life based on trust and respect could be established among the members of a Muslim community (Qutb, 1992, 6:3345).

Another principle applicable to Muslim life and responsibility in society concerned their position on receiving news from a liar (fasiq). They were required to verify the news carefully so that they would not harm others in ignorance. Verse 6 of Sura 49 (al-Hujarat) clearly reminds Muslims:

O you who believe! If a fasiq (liar) comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you should harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you regret what you have done.

Qutb contended that the verse referred mainly to two groups of Muslims: those in authority and all Muslim believers. Those in authority should clearly verify news coming from the fasiq because any wrong judgement they made on its basis would seriously undermine their leadership and the community as a whole, since it concerned the implementation of the shar‘a law which sought to establish justice in human society. If the judgement were wrong, their credibility would be lost in the eyes of the public. Qutb understood the verse to show the position of Muslims in such a situation and advise the appropriate response. Once unreliable news spread in society, it created doubt among everyone and their lives based on trust would collapse. That was why the word fasiq is mentioned in the verse to differentiate its attributes from those of Muslim believers who enjoyed mutual trust (Qutb, 1992, 6:3340-3341).

Co-operation and solidarity in the Muslim community includes the prevention of all forms of evil. Therefore, all its members, whether individuals or a group, are required to look after the welfare of fellow Muslims and bring them back to the right path if they have deviated from the truth. In fact, there is a saying of the Prophet which asks individual Muslims to act responsibly upon seeing wrongdoing:

Whoever among you sees any wrong-doing, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot do that, let him change it with his tongue; if he cannot do that; let him change it with his heart; and that shows the weakest faith.

Citing this hadith, Qutb contended that enjoining good and forbidding evil doing were attributes of the Muslim umma. If none of its members took on this responsibility, the so called umma Muslimah (Muslim community) would no longer exist in a real sense (wujudan haqiqiyyan) (Qutb, 1992, 1:448). Qutb saw that among the problems facing the Muslim umma
of the modern age was that immorality and wrongdoing were personal matters and no one had the right to interfere. Furthermore, history showed that the religious scholars’ silence regarding wrongdoing of some of the people was among the reasons for the destruction of the children of Israel: their state passed away and their cultural identity disappeared. In describing the phenomenon, Qutb quoted the Prophet’s tradition, narrated by Ibn Mas‘ud who was the closest to the Prophet in character:

“When the children of Israel fell into disobedience, their scholars (‘ulama’) forbade them but they did not stop, so they sat with them and ate and drank with them (in their session), and God set them against each other and cursed them by the tongue of Dawud, Sulayman and Jesus the son of Maryam....” (then the Prophet sat and rested his weight and said) “No, by Him in whose hand my soul is, not until they bend themselves to the truth.” (Qutb, 1992, 1:448).

It seems that Qutb’s personal ordeal together with that of other Ikhwān members and his experience of living under the Nasserite regime during 1950s-60s very much influenced his emphasis on this matter. Clearly, his experience of torture and oppression received little response from the public, many of whom kept silent and were afraid to react against wrongdoing on the part of the government. As Khalidi writes, Qutb’s prison experience enabled him to see the real situation of his fellow Muslims in Egypt at that time. Many questions revolved in his mind:

how can the enemy be united among them, irrespective of their class differences, in their efforts to combat the Islamic movement? Why were their officers so faithful in implementing the orders of their masters? Why did they repudiate sincere and honest people? Why did the masses surrender their innocent children to work with their enemy and let them be comrades with those inhumane (people)? And why did they then keep silent about their wrongdoing, such as oppressing and torturing (fellow men)? (Khalidi, 1986:28)

Besides making an effort to end wrongdoing, it is also the community’s responsibility to look after the welfare of those members who are weak among its members and to protect them, as the Qur’an (4:75) states:

And what is wrong with you that you fight not in the Cause of Allah, and for those weak, ill-treated and oppressed among men, women, and children, whose cry is: “Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from You one who will protect, and raise for us from You one who will help.”

Interpreting this verse, Qutb saw that the protection given to these people was not based merely on family ties or blood relationship. More importantly, it was based on a similar faith and belief (‘aqīda) shared by both parties, since faith was the most valuable asset in a Muslim’s life, compared with other tribulations (financial difficulties, and lose of honour, self and land) (Qutb, 1992, 2:708, Nooriaihan, 2015).

The protection of children, the weak and the sick ill person among men and women also meant providing financial support and general welfare. If orphans had no one to act as their guardians, for instance, then the community as a whole had to take responsibility for looking after them and their property until they reached the age of discretion, so no one would take advantage of their vulnerability. This property, however, was to be returned to the orphans once they reached the age of discretion (bulugh) (Qutb, 1995, 1:586). Such protection given by Islam to these people, Qutb contended, was not found in the jahiliyya society before the coming of Islam. In those days, the orphans, women and children had no place in the eyes of the jahiliyya community at a whole, since they did not make any contribution to the society such as taking part in battle, etc., and had nothing to be proud of. Islam, however, enabled and permitted them to have a right to the wealth left by their parents and close family (Qutb, 1992, 1:586).
The community’s responsibility to these people was not limited to protecting their wealth. If they were poor, it was the community’s responsibility to pay them the zakat. Qutb maintained that the state had an important role to play to ensure the effective management of zakat according to the shari'a law (Qutb, 1992: 1:587).

One can see here how Islam has recognized the concept of solidarity in the lives of Muslims by using all possible means to maintain stability and peace for all the community’s members. For this reason, any attempt to destroy this solidarity by wrongdoing is prohibited and there is a severe punishment for those who commit these social crimes. The penalty for killing or wounding, for instance, has been laid down as an exact equivalent, as the Qur’an states: “free man for free man, slave for slave, female for female” (Qutb, 1992, 2:178). A similar principle applies to theft, which deserves a severe punishment since it is a crime against property. “As for the thief, man or woman, cut their hands as a recompense for what they have accumulated; a chastisement from Allah.” (Quran, 5:38).

Interpreting these verses, Qutb contended that Islam sought to improve the personal character of individual Muslims by training their consciences to fear God and by emphasizing to them the means of earning wealth by working, not by stealing from and killing their fellow men and women. If they were experiencing financial difficulties and needed income support, there was the law which gave the poor and needy the right to the wealth of the rich through zakat and other voluntary donations. Therefore, there was no reason for anyone to choose stealing and killing to satisfy his personal desires in this life. Thus a severe punishment for these people was appropriate, according to their evil doings (Qutb, 1992, 1:164, 2:2883).

4. CONCLUSION

As a whole we found that Qutb’s discussion on the concept of social solidarity in Islam saw faith (iman) as the most important element in establishing feelings of love and mercy in the human conscience towards other members of the community. This is because from faith generates good conduct and good deeds, since it is derived from a clear perception of life, and the purpose of one’s existence in this world is to submit all one’s life to God and follow His program or manhaj. In addition, a firm faith (iman thabit) in God acts as a means for individuals to differentiate between good and evil, since the community alone could not stand against widespread wrongdoing, which has wrought destruction in some areas. This approach proposed by Qutb was in many ways, in line with Islamic teachings and other Muslim scholars view on the subject. As the Prophet Muhammad’s da’wah in Mecca for the period of 13 years, saw his emphasis on aqida and monotheism became his main priority rather than emphasising on the Islamic Shari ‘a and muamalah which were stressed and focussed later on during his stay in Medina for the period of 10 years.

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