Chapter Four

Islamization of Society
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ISLĀMIZATION OF SOCIETY

JĀHILIYYAH

One of the concepts which was vehemently articulated and theorized by Sayyid Qutb is the concept of Jāhiliyyah. Throughout the Muslim world he is seen as the most profound theoretician of the concept. Jāhiliyyah, a term taken directly from the Qurʾān, specifically refers to the period of pre-Islāmic ignorance in Arabia. This ignorance of the pre-Islāmic Arabs primarily consisted of their refusal to acknowledge the oneness of God or their unawareness of His message or eternal laws.¹

Prior to Qutb, the term Jāhiliyyah was used by Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb Abul Hassan Ali Nadwi as well. Mawdudi described two forms of Jāhiliyyah in his work “Islām and Ignorance”, (i) that form of Jāhiliyyah wherein a person relies exclusively upon his own senses for solving the fundamental problems of his life like what is the purpose of his life? Is he responsible or irresponsible? Is there any superior being that controls this world? And so on. Mawdudi calls this form of ignorance as sheer ignorance. He further asserts that an inevitable consequence of sheer ignorance is that the entire range of human conduct should be unfettered and devoid of any sense of responsibility. (ii) A second form of Jāhiliyyah described by Mawdudi is the one wherein a person combines observation with conjecture and speculation to solve such problems of life. Mawdudi explains that three different strains of thought arise out of this form of Jāhiliyyah and each strain of thought produces a particular type of behavior.

First is polytheism and the behavior that springs from belief in polytheism is characterized by superstitions, endless cycles of rituals, exploitation and error.

Second is Monasticism which produces a kind of behavior that promotes individualism at the expense of collectivism, causes good men to live a life of hermits, and provides a loophole for despots to extend their tyrannical rule rather smoothly. Monasticism also conflicts with human nature.

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The third strain of thought is what is popularly known as the Doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud. This doctrine implies that every thing is God and is ascribed to Muḥidin ibn al-Arābi. According to Mawdūdī, it inculcates a kind of attitude in man that makes him doubt the reality of his own existence, lose all initiative, consider himself a mere puppet and so on.\(^2\)

Sayyid Abūl Ḥasan Alī Nādwi talks of Īḥālīyyah in his work “What has the world lost by the decline of Muslims”? The book primarily seeks to explain the decline of Islam by offering a historical account of its rise, expansion and gradual regression. The author’s depiction of ‘Muslim decadence’ which is seen to have taken place under the Ottomans, is followed by a grim description of the genealogy of western civilization, embracing the Greeks, the Romans, Christianity, materialism, the theory of evolution, nationalism and scientific progress. According to him, ‘Christian Europe’ has become in its entire civilization ‘pagan and materialistic’ (Īḥālīyyah -Mādiyya). The Muslims have been forced to join in this mad pursuit of materialism turning into ‘mere passengers’ in a train driven by European nations. He however, asserts that the Muslims are essentially immune to outright ‘pagan materialism’, since their spiritual heritage is still ‘preserved in its pristine purity’.\(^3\)

Qutb borrowed this concept mainly from Abūl Alā Mawdūdī to give it its contemporary meaning as a condition rather than a particular historical period, a state of ignorance into which a society degenerates whenever it deviates from the Islāmic way of life.\(^4\)

It was through the concept of “Īḥālīyyah” as a condition, that Qutb analyzed the modern society and sought to expose its ills and deficiencies. This analysis led him to adopt an uncompromising approach as vindicated by his Milestones. In this work Qutb classifies the world into black and white. There are the Īḥālī societies and the Islāmic societies. The former is characterized by an ignorance of God’s guidance (Qur’ān), submission to man made laws and conformation to man made systems of life, while the latter is characterized by a sincere adherence to God’s guidance in all its affairs and His acknowledgement as the only sovereign on earth.\(^5\) In order to fully comprehend the meaning of
Jāhiliyyah as conceived by Qutb, it is quite plausible to go back to his understanding of the Qur’ān’s account of the beginning of the world. Man was sent by God to establish His (God’s) authority on earth as is vindicated by the Qur’ānic verse “God told angels: ‘I am appointing man as a vicegerent on the earth’.” Hence man was established as the master of earth and everything created in it is for his benefit. Man has control over the material world; he is its master, not slave. Man was ranked higher than angels because God ordered them to prostrate themselves before Adam. However, one angel who came to be known as Iblis or satan refused. Therefore Iblis was the first non-believer and for Qutb the first promoter of Jāhiliyyah. Qutb states that thus began the long struggle between “iblis-the epitome of evil and man-God’s vicegerent on earth”. Man would always win this struggle as long as he follows God’s guidance.

Nonetheless, man soon lost the first battle with Iblis by disobeying God’s guidance to not go close to a particular tree. As a consequence to this disobedience, both man and Iblis were ordered to descend from paradise to earth by God. However God made a significant declaration “Guidance shall reach you from Me. Those who follow My guidance shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve, but those who deny and gainsay Our revelations, shall have the fire wherein they shall abide”.

God forgave man for his first choice of Jāhiliyyah, but send him to earth and reminded him that divine guidance will come. God firmly commands man to follow His divine guidance lest he shall suffer. In this way man’s authority on earth was never intended to be separated from God. Without God’s guidance man loses authority and legitimacy as a ruler on earth. By ignoring God’s guidance, he rebels against God’s sovereignty on earth. Further, he loses his ability to live harmoniously on earth.

Qutb, like other devout Muslims believes that Muhammad (S.A.W) was sent as a final messenger of God’s divine guidance in the form of Qur’ān. The Qur’ān is God’s final guide for man to live a full and harmonious life that is in accordance with his nature. Those who ignore it are guilty of Jāhiliyyah.
Throughout human history men have disobeyed God. But God sent messengers from time to time to mankind whenever they fell into the state of Jähiliyyah. In short, Jähiliyyah results whenever man ignores the divine commands given by God’s messengers. Thus for Qutb, Jähiliyyah is not a period of time, rather it is a condition that is repeated every time society swerves from the Islamic way whether in the past, the present or future. The difference between the historical Jähiliyyah and the one prevailing in the world today is that the latter is more sinister since it is created willingly by men who usurp the role of God. The older Jähiliyyah was based on ignorance, naiveté and youth, but the contemporary Jähiliyyah is grounded in knowledge, complexity and contempt. Moreover, the present day Jähiliyyah has gone much beyond the older Jähiliyyah in that the older Jähiliyyah still took seriously the notion that a divinity, or in the case of polytheism a plurality of divinities, was sovereign over mere men; present day Jähiliyyah on the other hand takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behavior, and to choose any way of the life rests with men, without regard to what God has prescribed.

“Today we are in similar or darker Jähiliyyah, than that contemporaneous to early Islām. All that surrounds us is Jähiliyyah. People’s visions, beliefs, their habits and customs, their source of knowledge, art, literature rules and laws, even what we consider as Islāmic education and Islāmic thought - all of it is the product of Jähiliyyah”. Qutb finds the Jähili systems adopted by human beings for themselves contrary to human nature and capable of providing only partial solutions to human problems. In such systems, man’s unrestrained greed and self-aggrandizement become the overwhelming forces that dominate social economic and political relationships among their members leading inevitably to injustice and exploitation of some classes, races or nations by others. Qutb argues that “Islām does not took at the labels, titles or banners that those various societies have adopted, they all have one thing in common and that is
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their way of life is not based on the principle of complete submission to Allah alone.\textsuperscript{15}

CHARACTERISTICS OF JĀHILIYYAH

Usurpation of Sovereignty:

To Qutb, sovereignty----a term derived from Latin word ‘\textit{superanus}’ meaning supreme power or supreme authority, belongs to God alone. He, in fact, asserts that it is the greatest attribute of Allah. This is because the ‘law’ is nothing but the will or command of the sovereign i.e. a sovereign is the source of law. To vest the legislative power or the law making power in any other person, body of persons or institution is to reject the sovereignty of Allah. That is why in his “\textit{Milestones}” Qutb describes Jāhiliyyah or a Jāhili society a flagrant manifestation of the usurpation of this greatest attribute of Allah. A Jāhili society puts the legislation power in man made authorities or institutions, thus raising them to the status of God.

All Jāhili societies, no matter what outward forms they may assume, have in common one important feature that is their violation of the exclusive sovereignty of God. Non Muslim societies are Jāhili not only because “their forms of worship, their customs and manners are derived form false and distorted beliefs” but principally because “their institutions and their laws are not based on submission to God alone”. Instead of accepting “the rule of God”, these societies each in its own way, have established assemblies of men which have absolute power to legislate laws, thus usurping the right which belongs to God alone.\textsuperscript{16} By the same token, the Muslim societies are Jāhili “not because they believe in other deities besides God or because they worship any other than God, but because their way of life is not based on submission to God alone”.\textsuperscript{17} Belief that does not manifest in protest against the usurpation of divine sovereignty—is false belief according to Qutb. Although present day Muslims believe in the unity of God, still they have relegated the legislative attribute of God to others and submit to this authority, and from this authority, they derive their systems, their traditions and customs, their laws, their values, their standards and almost every practice of life”.\textsuperscript{18} Qutb strengthens his
argument by quoting the verse from the holy Qur‘ān, “those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are unbelievers”.19

Further, Qutb attributes the main cause of the existence of human bondage and misery at the hands of others to this very act of the usurpation of God’s sovereignty on earth. He asserts that in the Islāmic society where sovereignty exclusively belongs to God, the exploitation of man by man is simply not conceivable. It is because, first, a society fashioned in accordance with the Islāmic conception is a society of justice; it is an order in total harmony with the natural order; its members truly believing in God’s exclusive sovereignty, will be infused with the spirit of Islām, will practice Islām in their daily lives, and will find repugnant and contrary to their conceptions of life relationships of human submission to another human; and in truly Islāmic society, the exploitation of man by man can not take hold since true belief in God’s exclusive sovereignty is a belief that instantaneously gets translated into action to engage itself in the struggle against injustice; the Islāmic society would not, therefore, tolerate the lordship of man without fighting and struggling against it.

“When the highest authority is God alone—and is expressed in the dominance of divine law-----this sovereignty is the only kind in which humans are truly liberated form slavery to men. Only this is ‘human civilization’ because human civilization requires that the basis of rule be the true and the perfect freedom of man and the absolute dignity of each individual in society. There is no true freedom and no dignity for men or for each and every individual in a society where some individuals are lords who legislate and others are slaves who obey”.20

Demotion of Humanity:

For Qutb, a Jähili society is intrinsically anti-humanistic. Because man-made rules reign supreme and God’s commandments are disregarded in such societies, not only does man’s humanity get demoted but his morality too gets atrophied and his animalistic instincts bloom to their fullest extent. Qutb studied the anatomy of the western Jähili societies (capitalist as well as
communist societies) to firmly confirm his belief that a Jāḥili society reduces man from the God-given dignified status of noblest of the creations to merely an animal. The western societies, Jāḥili as they are, developed a lopsided materialist understanding of human nature. But such materialist philosophy which ignores the spiritual aspect of human life was bound to lead the western societies to a state of animalism. The western values according to him are animal values, because they fail to elevate man above the level of animals. Just as animals govern themselves by material impulse, so do the western Jāḥili societies. Qutb points to the western families, sexuality, capitalism, freedom and natural laws as evidence of animal values. First Qutb criticizes the western family. According to him the western family has been infected with the disease of Jāḥiliyyah, which in turn communicated it to the whole society. The purpose of family, according to him, is to socialize children in Islāmic values i.e. to impart Islāmic values to the next generation. However, the West has degraded the role of the family. The root cause of this degradation is in the way West treats the women. Qutb claims that western relationships revolve around lust, passion and impulse. Women have disregarded their duty to rear children and have become objects of sexual pleasure. In the essay The America I have seen, Qutb describes the way women act in America thus; “The American girl is well acquainted with her body’s seductive capacity. She knows it lies in the face, and in expressive eyes and thirsty lips. She knows seductiveness lies in the round breasts, the full buttocks and in the shapely thighs, sleek legs and she knows all this and does not hide it! Then she adds to all this the fetching laugh, the naked looks and the bold moves and she does not ignore this for one moment or forget it”.  

By using their bodies in this manner women are prone to be treated by men as sexual objects rather than dignified child bearers. At the same time Qutb laments at American men for using their muscular build to woo women. He cites an article in a magazine which surveyed different women, coming to the conclusion that the majority were attracted to men with “ox muscles”. Such
public discussion of sexuality is an example of what Qutb argues is the “sexual primitiveness of the West”.\(^{22}\)

Moreover, Qutb argues that women in the west have ceased to be dedicated mothers on both the physical and spiritual levels. Instead, they have dedicated themselves to work. They view dedicated motherhood as squandering their talents and abilities. Qutb points to this concept as a manifestation of the backward materialist values of the western society, where “material production is regarded as more important, more valuable and more honorable than the development of human character”.\(^{23}\) Keeping these factors in mind, Qutb argues that it is no surprise that the high rates of divorce and illegitimate children are considered mainstream and acceptable in the West. He also cites homosexuality as another example of sexual permissiveness that typifies western Jāhilī society. Due to this, he asserts that the western family has ceased to be a positive moral force.\(^{24}\)

Qutb also criticized the west’s use of capitalism, because it leads to the sacrifice of moral values in the name of material gain. To him, each political or economic system has one dominant characteristic that determines the distribution and functions of its other elements. The dominant characteristic of capitalism is usury (Riba). An Islāmic economic system on the other hand, is distinguished by its corporate and income tax known as Zakat and its condemnation of usury.\(^{25}\) Since usury is the dominant feature of capitalism, it naturally remains oblivious of a sense of economic justice and thus enables few wealthy to enslave the majority. Qutb’s critique of capitalism sounds socialist at first; it should be understood within the Islāmic context. Because God is the only true owner of any object, society is obliged to use property for the glory of God and the good of Muslim community. In this sense, private property is not inviolate because society has been commanded by God to use its material possessions for the gain of all instead of individual profit: “The individual is in a way a steward of his property on behalf of society: his tenure of property is more of a duty than an actual right of possession. Property in the widest sense is a right that can only belong to society, which in turn receives it as trust from
Allāh who is the only true owner of anything”. Thus private ownership becomes more theoretical than of being practical. In short capitalist economic system, too as a manifestation of Jāhiliyyah system disregards the humanity of man. Moreover, Qutb argues that the West’s understanding of freedom, further confirms its animalism. Although, men may enjoy self-government in a liberal democracy, they are slaves rather than free. Their notion of freedom does not take note of enslavement of man by man according to Qutb. In effect, he is both a slave to himself as well as to other men. He is a slave to himself in the sense that self-government allows him to legislate his own desires, which are ignorant of God’s law. He is slave to other men because he lives under a man made system where men legislate what other men can or can not do; hence Muslims are denied the ability to worship God with full submission. For Qutb, rather than exhibiting the dignity of man, this brand of freedom denies it. The law of God was prescribed to free men from service to other men. Yet western Jāhiliyyah denies men the opportunity to free themselves. Furthermore, the West believes that man’s freedom exists in accordance with the natural law. Such an understanding of the natural law is another animalistic idea that Qutb criticizes. The West argues that the natural laws governing humanity can be discerned through reason. For Qutb, this is another example of how Jāhiliyyah permits the West to delude itself into believing that man is autonomous. Qutb argues that just as God ordered nature, he ordered human life through the Shariah; “He who has created the universe and man and who made man subservient to the laws that also govern the universe, has also prescribed the Shariah for his voluntary actions. If man follows Shariah, it results in harmony between his life and his nature. Each word of Allāh is part of the universal law and is as accurate and true as any of the laws known as the laws of nature. Thus the Shariah given to man to organize his life is also a universal law because it is related to the general law of the universe and is harmonious with it”. The Shariah allows men and society to work in harmony just as the rest of the nature does. If humanity chooses to ignore the Shariah, it will live like animals, for society will become an uncivilized jungle that is in a constant state of war.
Society will inevitably fall into constant conflict and suffering, because man’s rationality is incapable of providing answers. Qutb quotes the Qur’an to prove the inability of man’s rationality to arrive at truth.29 “Had truth followed their (men’s) opinions, the heavens and earth and whosoever is in them, would surely have been corrupted”30.

Like capitalism of the West, the communist societies too, are inherently harmful to man’s humanity. The atheistic Marxism in fact treats man as a tool of production, an animal whose horizon does not extend beyond food, drink and lowly material needs. It thus debases human soul, depriving man of his most precious soul31. More or less, same is true of those self-acclaimed Muslim societies who do not adhere to Shariah but tend to borrow ideas from these western Jāhili societies.

**ISLĀMIC SOCIETY**

Qutb’s preoccupation with the establishment of an ideal Islāmic society is attested both by his pervasive writing as well as by his own martyrdom. However, he does not view this Islāmic society new. His vision is a restoration, not an innovation. According to him, this revival aims to restore society to its original Godly intent. God created society to worship Him as its Sovereign and follow His guidance in full submission. The prototype of this ideal Islāmic society, according to Qutb, is provided by two societies in history; one the original community or the first community of mankind and the second one, the first Qur’ānic generation or the generation of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and that of his four rightly guided caliphs’.

For Qutb the significance of original community or the first community, which comprised of Adam (A.S), Hawa (A.S) and their off springs, is that it shows the humans share the same origin because we are the members of the same family of Adam and Hawa (A.S). Qutb claims that this original family was tightly-knit and had a uniform belief that God was Sovereign. As this original community grew over time, it evolved and new cultural norms began to develop. Qutb argues that God intended for the original community to grow and evolve. Because God created and understood human nature, He knew that
men would differ in their opinions. Consequently, He sent prophets to the people to establish and guide them to differentiate between truth and deviation. The prophets were to establish truth through the Book. Qutb claims that the Book is not only the Qur’an, but all revelation given by God to mankind through various prophets from time to time since the creation of first community. Hence each of the prophets form Nuh (A.S) to Muhammad (S.A.W), taught in essence the same Book of God. The Book taught that only God is the Sovereign and to attribute this sovereignty to any other person or thing is to fall into a state of Jähiliyyah. Nonetheless, communities rejected God, His Book and His Prophets by continuing in Jähiliyyah. Qutb views Islamic society as a restoration of the original community, which was unified under God’s authority prior to the deviation of Jähiliyyah.

The creation of the Islāmic society would also be a restoration of what Qutb refers to as the “unique Qur’ānic generation” i.e. the generation of the Prophet (S.A.W) and his companions. Qutb asserts that history has not seen a better or similar generation to the generation of companions since the inception of life on the earth. The uniqueness of this “generation of the companions of the prophet” is attributed to three main factors by Qutb. Firstly, the companions followed the pristine teachings of Qur’ān as their only guidelines. Qutb claims that they derived their entire system of life, both as individuals and as a community, from the Qur’ān. He emphasizes that they did not rely on the Qur’ān out of ignorance; they were aware of other cultures and civilizations like Roman, Greek, Persian, Indian, Chinese, Christian and Jewish. Rather they chose the Qur’ān because it was a pure spring of knowledge from God. While other Muslim societies have used the Qur’ān, Qutb argues that they have not followed the example set by the generation of companions of the Prophet (S.A.W). Qutb argues that the purity of the Qur’ān could not be maintained by the latter generations of the Muslims; as they went on to mingle with it not only the non Islāmic ideas borrowed from Greek philosophy, Jewish scriptures and so on, but also the Islāmic scholastic theology and jurisprudence. Consequently, the later generations after the generation of companions of the
Prophet (S.A.W) were brought up and trained with this mixed source and hence the generation like this was never witnessed again.\(^3\)

Secondly, the “generation of the companions of the Prophet (S.A.W)” viewed the Qur’ān as a book of instructions and keenly aspired to mould their life according to these instructions. Their desire to practice the instructions of the Qur’ān is vindicated by the way they approached the Qur’ān. They would at the most recite ten verses of the Qur’ān at a time and then strive to bring them into practice rather than reciting long passages to make it virtually impossible to follow these passages simultaneously. In his own words: “None of them came to the Qur’ān to increase his knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself or to solve some scientific or legal problems, or to improve his understanding. Rather he turned to the Qur’ān to find out what the Almighty creator has prescribed for him and for the group in which he lived; for his life and for the life of the group. He approached it to act immediately on what he heard, as a soldier on the battle field reads ‘Today’s Bulletin so that he may know what is to be done’.”\(^4\) Hence revelation was practical and intended for literal application. The new Islamic society should restore this view of the Qur’ān, and reject any form of Islam that is merely theoretical, abstract and reflective.

Lastly, the moment a person embraced Islam in time of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), he separated himself from Jāhiliyyah completely. Qutb believes that the ‘unique Quranic generation” rejected any Jāhilī environment and adhered to Islam completely. They developed an uncompromising attitude towards the Jāhiliyyah and were never tempted to mix their Islamic instructions with the instructions of Jāhili society. Because they no longer valued Jāhiliyyah, “no pressure from Jāhilī society could have any effect on their firm resolve”. Qutb stresses this point in “Milestones” because he felt that most Muslims during his time were compromising with Jāhiliyyah and mixing many of its beliefs and ideas with Islam. He writes on this point with such emotional fervor which is reflective of his discontent. “We are also surrounded by Jāhiliyyah today, which is of the same nature as it was during the first period of Islam, perhaps a little deeper. Our whole environment, people’s beliefs and
ideas, habits and art, rules and laws— is Jāhiliyyah, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought are also constructs of Jāhiliyyah. This is why the true Islamic values never enter our hearts, why our minds are never illuminated by Islamic concepts, and why no group of people arises among us who are of equal caliber to that of the first generation of Islam”. Qutb demands that the modern Islamic movement should refuse to concede anything to Jāhili societies, especially to the West. This is a reflection of his belief that truth and falsehood can never co-exist. The moment the truth i.e. Islam accepts any attributes of falsity or Jāhiliyyah, it loses its superiority.

Qutb demands that just as the first generation of Muslims created a community with faith as its foundation, so should the new Islamic society. He claims that this spiritual foundation comes through the confession of the first article of faith that “there is no God but Allāh”. Each member of the Islamic society should make this confession and live by it. If they live by this confession, Qutb claims that Islamic society can then build up its own institutions and practices into a fully Islamic society, with every aspect under God’s sovereignty. Society should be based on belief because it is man’s distinguishing attribute. According to Qutb, Islamic society will not pay heed to nationalism, class or race. It will be a community of believers. Qutb claims that Islamic society will be greater than any other, because it bases itself on spirituality. Islam’s focus on spirituality is all inclusive for humankind and brings out man’s most noble characteristics. Qutb argues that nationalist, materialist, and ethnic societies base themselves on attributes that man has in common with animals. Consequently, they put a ceiling on societal progress and prosperity. Although western societies may have reached high levels of economic prosperity, they suffer morally and spiritually because of their ignorance of man’s need for spiritual. According to him, Islamic society will be the most civilized because it will give true freedom, which is spiritual freedom to each individual; it ensures true freedom by ending man’s enslavement of other men as is found in the Jāhili society. Islam frees them to worship God
alone. Qutb believes that this type of spiritual freedom creates a freedom of conscience that destroys the barriers between God and man. While living life according to the demands of other men and man made laws, humans are incapable of fully understanding God because they are prohibited from worshipping Him in complete submission. However, in Islamic society, man will be able to devote all thought and action to God, thereby giving him the opportunity to meet his highest spiritual potential. Qutb in short wants Muslims to grapple for restoring Islamic society, its essential attribute of supremacy of God’s law; i.e. true and firm acknowledgement on the part of the members of the society that sovereignty exclusively belongs to God and it shall be the basis of their society. When God is recognized as the only sovereign and His word or law (Shariah) reigns supreme in a society, it imparts a lively and dynamic character to the whole society. The members of such society enjoy true freedom, equality, justice and economic and spiritual prosperity. However, Qutb laments that such an immensely essential principle, that is Sovereignty exclusively belongs to God, has ceased to be the governing principle in contemporary Muslim societies, as a result of which Qutb views them as forms of Jāhilī order: “The Muslim community has been extinct for a few centuries, for Muslim community does not denote the name of a land in which Islām resides, nor is it a people whose forefathers lived under the Islāmic system at some earlier time. It is the name of a group of people whose manners, ideas and concepts, rules and regulations, values and criteria, are all derived from the Islāmic source. The Muslim community with these characteristics vanished at the moment laws of God became suspended on earth”.  

CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLĀMIC SOCIETY

Liberty:

According to Qutb, in the Islāmic society wherein sovereignty is acknowledged as the sole attribute of God, individual liberty becomes an intrinsic character of society. Once a person acknowledges the sovereignty of God and as a corollary to this accepts that only God has the right of obedience
over him, he becomes liberated from all sorts of bogus authorities including his own desires and passions.

**Equality:**

According to Qutb like liberty, equality too is possible only under a divine Sovereign, where all members are equal by virtue of their common submission to God. This is not the Lockean idea of equality whereby all persons are free and equal in that each has a natural right to life, liberty and property. Rather, it is the case since all are equally subject to God’s call, they are therefore equal: “the citizenship İslām intends for men is a citizenship of belief through which all...are equal under the banner of Allāh”. In *Social Justice in Islām*, Qutb seems to define such natural equality in the sight of God primarily in terms of racial equality, and equality in status, origin and station. Yet, like Aristotle and Rousseau, Qutb goes on to argue that such equality does not and should not deny the existence of inequalities in natural endowments such as intellect, strength, beauty or inequalities resulting from such “natural” differences as gender. To ignore such natural inequalities is to level differential talents down to the lowest common denominator. In short, Qutb’s claim that an İslāmic society guarantees true freedom and equality is because, as he argues in the ‘Milestones’, once sovereignty is established in the proper scope (like in İslāmic society), social justice, equality and freedom will naturally follow. Thus both equality and freedom are premised upon submission to God’s will through membership in His community.\(^{40}\)

**Equality of sexes and stability of Family:**

According to Qutb, one of the most salient examples of western bankruptcy is the deterioration of family unit in the West. In *Social Justice in Islām*, he argues that it is through the strength of the family unit——specialization of work between the sexes, mother as a primary caretaker——that the morals of the next generation are inculcated and reinforced. When a woman becomes a sexual object, that is, when men objectify her or when she asserts her sexual identity; when she abandons the natural division of labor between the sexes and enters the workforce; when the relationship between
men and women is matter of lust and impulse, society has ceased to be part of what he calls a civilization. In fact, Qutb goes so far as to say that the relationship between sexes is the key to the entire character of a society. It determines whether a society is civilized or backward. \(^{41}\) Responding to the baseless criticism of Islām’s unequal treatment, Qutb argues that, “Islām has guaranteed to women complete equality with men with regard to their sex”. \(^{42}\) However, their differing physical endowments give the sexes different practical roles in society. Due to their maternal responsibility, women must tend to the family and rearing of children. Males have no such child-bearing physical qualities; therefore, they are able to attend to work and societal affairs. Man’s attention to women develops differing abilities. Man’s attention to societal issues causes him to become more intellectual, thoughtful and reflective whereas a woman’s focus on her family will cause her to grow in emotions and sentimentality. Qutb argues that wherever, physical endowments and resulting responsibilities or roles are identical, the two sexes are treated equal. To prove this point, he mentions that women may choose their husband and dowry. Qutb realizes that the West views Islāmic equality as sexism. In response, he argues that the West establishes equality only in economic terms, whereas Islām provides a holistic spiritual equality that recognizes the differing qualities of the sexes. \(^{43}\)

**Mutual responsibility:**

The Islāmic society, according to Qutb will also follow the principle of mutual responsibility. He believes that mutual responsibility must exist on several levels. First the individual must have responsibility towards himself. This is his personal responsibility for the status of his soul. He must keep his soul true to the Islāmic faith. Second, the individual has responsibility towards his family. To Qutb family is the most important unit of society. It acts as the most important agency of socialization and inculcates Islāmic norms and values in the children of the family and, thereby, in transferring these values from one generation to next. It also acts as a model for the larger family of society. In fact, it is for this reason that Islām has established rules regarding inheritance;
just as a child inherits the physical and mental traits of his parents, he has the right to their material possessions. This mutual responsibility also extends to the relationship between individual and the society. The individual oversees the welfare of the society. His work adds to the prosperity of the society; in this way, his work fulfills his obligations to himself, his family, and society. Nonetheless, man can not do whatever he pleases, for he is responsible to the society. And, conversely, in the same way, the society is responsible to all individuals. It must protect the whole society, so that individuals can not direct it in order to seek their own interests. To illustrate this point, Qutb quotes a story attributed to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). In the story, a group of persons was traveling in the ship and were partners; of them each one had his own place. One man among them struck his place with an axe and the reminder said to him, “What are you doing? He said, “This is my place and I can do what I wish in it. Them if they (rest of the people) restrain him, he and they are safe; but if they let him be, he and they all perish”. Hence individuals have freedom to do as they please; however, if their actions are evil or detrimental to society as a whole, the society is responsible to protect the welfare of all individuals. Islamic society has this responsibility because; it is a unified community of believers. It can not passively accept evil, for it must stand for truth.

Accordingly, Islamic society is responsible for the care of its weak members. For this reason, all members of the society pay Zakat. The Zakat is a charitable tax that is paid to provide for the sustenance of those who can not provide for themselves. Qutb claims that “if any individual passes the night hungry, the blame attaches to the community because it did not bestir itself to feed him”. Qutb compares Islamic society to one body because it is a community of believers. “The whole Islamic community is like one body, and it feels all things in common; whatever happens to one of its members, the remainders of the members are also affected. This is in the perfect, descriptive smile which the noble messenger uses of it when he says: ‘The likeness of the believers in their mutual love and mercy and relationship is that of the body; when one
member is afflicted, all the rest of the body joins with it to suffer feverish sleeplessness”.

**Justice:**

Since the ancient times when the society was in its primitive form, justice has been taken to be the most important concern for enhancing the overall well-being of the society. The Greek thinkers particularly Plato and Aristotle debated at length over this subject. Plato even went on to give a subtitle of “concerning justice” to his *magnum opus “The Republic”*. However, these thinkers as well as their successors even to this day could not arrive at a comprehensive conception of justice. For Qutb, Islam has this distinction that it provides us a comprehensive notion of justice. “It establishes this comprehensive human justice on two strong foundations: first, the human conscience, working within the spirit of man; and second a system of religious law working in the social sphere. These two powers are united by an appeal to the depths of feeling in the human consciousness. At the same time, Islam does not overlook the weakness of man, or his need for external compulsion.”

Islam reposes immense confidence in the human conscience when it is educated; it sets it up as the guardian of the legal processes, to see that they are observed and maintained. At the same time, it does not leave human conscience to its own resources; it challenges it to rise above what law and responsibility prescribe for it. It has set the fear of Allah as the sanction on the conscience, and has placed over it the thought of Allah’s omniscience, with the aim of ensuring and inspiring its activity.

Thus, Qutb believes the Islamic society takes full care to promote justice comprehensively with all its meticulous details through the implementation of *Shariah*. But the *Shariah* in turn, is implemented only after the conscience of its individual members concedes that this *Shariah* has been prescribed by God. That this Islamic society promotes justice meticulously is perhaps vindicated most unequivocally by the economic system operating in the Islamic society. Like all other aspects of the Islamic society, its economic system will also be governed by the principles of *Shariah*. Qutb claims that Islamic economic system has two objectives, first, the welfare
of the individual, and second, the welfare of the society as a whole. It accomplishes both by legislating practical laws that help maintain an economically fair, just and prosperous society. It also exhorts and encourages men to be moral in their economic choices. For example, individuals should not waste money on things like gambling and other forms of sinful entertainment. To Qutb, the natural corollary of confession of faith on the part of each member of the society is that its economy gets moulded into a more egalitarian form. This is because any member of Islamic society having committed faith will never choose to exploit others for his own benefit. At the same time, he will choose outlets such as alms-giving, for any excessive wealth which he may acquire.

**Harakah (Action or Dynamism):**

A sincere acknowledgement of Allāh’s absolute sovereignty on the part of man liberates him from all shackles of man made authorities according to Qutb. However, Qutb conceives that mere acknowledgement or mere belief in God’s sovereignty is not enough. It is only by investing his faith in action that man can obtain such freedom. In Qutb’s view man is an integrated being; he is both an actor-believer and a believer-actor. “Man’s concepts and ideas, behavior and responses, beliefs and actions... are all tied together”. When addressing man God does not expound on a philosophical system of ideas and abstractions, rather He insists that man act his belief. The necessity of action, Qutb notes is characteristic of all life conceptions: *a’aqeedah* (belief) always motivates people to action, propelling them towards definite goals through the wilderness of the time and the darkness of the way*. Islām is no exception to this rule. The nature of Islamic concept is not to remain hidden in the human mind. It must be translated immediately into action to become a concrete reality in the world of events. The believer can not be content to have his faith remain concealed in his heart, because he feels compelled to make his faith an effective force in changing his own life as well as the lives of the people around him. By virtue of being a world-concept, a life-creed, Islām assigns man an active role in this world and provides him with a particular plan of life-
action. This feature is bound to ensure dynamism of the Islamic society—always ready to crush the evil and progress towards the intrinsic goals of man’s viegerency on earth. The Islamic conception as taught in the Qur’an is a practical plan for the purpose of erecting an Islamic reality. The true believer who has interacted with the word of God, who believes in God’s absolute sovereignty, will not rest with mere passive belief; that very belief will continuously keep stirring him to act. “The Islamic concept keeps the mind of the Muslim restless, always calling him to action from the depths of his consciousness, telling him to get up ad go out and actualize this concept in the real world”.

In the Milestones, Qutb goes on to make action a requirement for being a “true” Muslim. It is not enough for Qutb that a community call itself Muslim, or that its members profess themselves Muslims; it must “act” its faith or otherwise renounce its claim to being Muslim: A Muslim community is that one which is a practical interpretation of declaration of faith and of all its corollaries; and the society which does not translate into practice this faith and its corollaries is not Muslim.

This stance of Qutb obviously contradicts the established orthodox tradition, which recognizes mere pronouncement of the article “There is no God but Allāh” on the part of a person for considering him to be a Muslim. But it is important to note that Qutb does not explicitly denounce individual Muslims as Kuffar, and rarely does he use the word ‘Kufr’ as such. What Qutb denounces as “un-Islamic” are the social system, the prevailing order, the “Nizam”. This stance of Qutb is understandable, especially when taking his own understanding of religion into consideration. Qutb, it may be noted, does not view religion comprising of worship alone. On the contrary, it must by necessity be involved with the mundane actions of human living. Man-devised social systems are also religious in Qutb’s view. Although a deity is not explicitly mentioned in man-made systems, a deity is still worshipped, be it a man, an idea, an institution, and so forth. Therefore, someone who lives by a creed other than Islām is a worshipper and follower of that creed and as a result
can not be considered a true Muslim, since he is committing the cardinal sin of association (shirk) of another deity to the one true God. It is important to note that Qutb’s breach with orthodoxy does not stem from his insistence that a true Muslim is one who sincerely submits to God and believes in His absolute sovereignty. On that score, Qutb is technically within orthodox bounds, if one accepts his assumptions. At the least, the Muslim who accepts a sovereign over him other than God is committing the basic sin of shirk, since he is associating some other entity with God; if he does believe in God and fulfills Islam’s pillars, but at the same time lives under a non-Islamic system, the least that can be said, given Qutb’s assumptions, is that this Muslim is worshipping two deities: Allāh and the deity representing the other social system he follows in his non-religious life. But worse, tradition requires the minimum of shahāda from the professing believer; someone who rejects Allāh’s absolute sovereignty or Muḥammad’s prophecy has not fulfilled the bare minimum for becoming Muslim, and therefore can not be a true Muslim. Qutb reasons that the true believer in Allāh’s absolute sovereignty will not accept any system of life except that of Islām: he will “rebels” against anyone and anything that constrains his freedom to act and believe, and will refuse to submit to any authority other than God; some who does submit and who does not fight, therefore can not be a true believer, but rather a nominal Muslim and for Qutb not a Muslim at all.

For Qutb the “generation of prophet and his four successors” represents the only historically established Islāmic society. He notes, that his society and the towering excellence which it achieved “was not the result of an unrepeatable miracle” but rather “the fruit of human exertion made by the first community” and that therefore, it “can be achieved whenever that exertion is again made. The possibility of reproducing the success of the generation of Prophet and his four successors” is at the heart of Qutb’s discourse of revolution. This generation of “Prophet and his companions” for Qutb is central because it is an event in history and in that event man plays a central role.
In *this religion of Islām*, Qutb asserts that “the (divine path) is not brought into being by divine enforcement, in the same way that God enforces His will in the ordering of the firmament and the revolution of the planets. It is brought into being by a group of people undertaking the task, believing in it completely and conforming to it as closely as possible, trying to bring it into being in the hearts and lives of others too”.

**Harmony:**

Qutb strongly believes that Islām is in perfect accordance with human nature. Because of this belief, he concedes that as long as each individual has sincere, genuine and devout faith, the society will work in harmony. It is precisely because of this reason that he does not endorse a monolithic Islāmic state that seeks to control the actions of the individuals. The government should not be controlling their actions. Instead, it should act on behalf of their faith. Qutb believes that with the removal of *Jāhili* institutions which inhibited the spiritual consciousness of the people, the government would only have to act in a limited number of ways. Initially the government may have to act strongly to establish God’s system of life. But for the Islāmic society, Qutb concedes, it will be anything but a tyranny. The community of believers will only approve and desire such actions because their faith demands it. Then over time, divine system of life will become so ingrained in the hearts and habits of the people that government action will became redundant.

**METHOD OF TRANSFORMATION**

The notion that the Islāmic society is not only unique and fundamentally different from other social systems but is the only society that is in perfect harmony with the natural scheme of the universe is a primary subtext that underlies the Qutbian discourse. Islām’s singularity and perfection inform how Qutb views other systems: for all their diversity, non-Islāmic societies are basically the same in their imperfections and weaknesses. Qutb argues that Islām’s uniqueness is attested by the singular universal success it achieved in the short span of time. Its uniqueness also lies in its purity and simplicity. It favours non-specialized and active readings of its message and it also refuses to
separate action from belief. Therefore, in the quest for re-establishing the Islamic order or Islamic society, Qutb proposes an Islamic retreat from impure i.e. non-Islamic and at the same time urges Muslims to engage in a struggle against what stands in the way of a truly Islamic reconfiguration of nominally Muslim society. This subtext is present in Qutb’s works from the very beginning of his Islamic writings, and remains in effect throughout his subsequent works. However, in his earlier works, just like Social Justice in Islam, Qutb just seems to be content with providing a framework for an Islamic order. In Social Justice in Islam, Qutb outlines what he believes to be the social, political and economic systems called for by Islam. In The Battle between Islam and Capitalism, Qutb is preoccupied with the immediate problems of social justice and wealth distribution faced by Muslim society and the solutions that Islam provides, and in The World Peace and Islam, Qutb turns his attention to illustrating how Islam can secure the world true peace, internationally, socially and spiritually. In these works significantly all of them written prior to 1952 Nasser revolution Islam’s purity and uniqueness inform the arguments and propositions made by Qutb, and are at times explicitly highlighted, but are seldom the direct object of systematic analysis. However, in Islamic Concept and its Characteristics, Qutb’s focus is no longer on mapping out an Islamic order or on the capacity of Islam to solve an array of problems that Muslim society faced. His focus has now clearly shifted from spelling out the outlines of the future Muslim society to an analysis and an elaboration of the conceptual substructure as he sees it, of both the Islamic order and its antithesis, the Jâhilî order. It is however, important to note that Qutb does not introduce any new themes and notions that were altogether absent in his previous works. On the contrary, a remarkable continuity is upheld across his body of works, in both the themes treated and tone used. According to Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi, Qutb’s phase of thought during the period of 1952-1962 is an extension, and not a negation of the previous phase. It is an elaboration on new themes during a unique historical era (the Egyptian revolution of 1952 and its aftermath). At the same time, however, it is
obvious that starting with *The Islamic Concept and its Characteristics*, Qutb is less interested in finding a place for Islam in the life that Muslims faced and more interested in defining the essence of whole new order. In his works, subsequent to the last mentioned work, Qutb’s aim is to highlight the essence of Islam through a precise and systematic vocabulary, rather than to illustrate Islam through the expansive language of example and elaboration. While his chapters in *Social Justice in Islam* bore titles such as “The methods of social justice in Islam” and “political theory is Islam” and so on, in *The Islamic concept and its characteristics* one finds single word title headings such as “divinity” (*Rubbaniyah*), “firmness” (*Thabat*), comprehensiveness (*shumul*) and so on. The turn to doctrinal Islam, as signaled in the last mentioned work, mirrors another turn in Qutb’s overall outlook and strategy. Qutb’s pre-1952 works are marked not only by their preoccupation with outlining substantive solutions to social, economic and political problems, but also by optimism in the possibility of changing society gradually. On the other hand Qutb’s post-1952 works, especially his works after 1954 while focusing on the elaboration of systematic doctrine, hold a decidedly pessimistic view of gradual reform. 1954 was the beginning of what turned out to be a bloody decade of confrontation between the Nasser regime and *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun* – a confrontation in which *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun* bore heavier toll. Sayyid Qutb spent most of his life between 1954 and his execution in 1966 in Nasser’s prison camps and it was in those camps that he charted out the renewal of his Islamic thought. Qutb’s writings during this period, especially the *Milestones* vividly project a revolutionary message. In this work, he considers the demolition of the *Jāhili* order a prerequisite for establishing the Islamic society. He in fact declares that it is the foremost duty of Islam to eliminate *Jāhiliyyah* from the leadership of man and to take this leadership into its own hands and enforce the particular way of life which is its permanent feature. Islam Qutb insists, did not come to accommodate or cohabit with the status quo. It did not come to “support people’s desires, which are expressed in their concepts, institutions, modes of living and habits and traditions. Rather it came to abolish
all such concepts, laws and traditions. Moreover, in its struggle to demolish Jāhiliyyah, Islām should at no point compromise, even momentarily, with the Jāhili order. The line between what is Jāhili and what is Islāmic is clearly drawn so that coexistence of Jāhili concepts and Islāmic concepts can not be sustained or tolerated in an Islāmic order. The true Islāmic method of bringing about the demise of Jāhili society and the establishment of Islāmic society is not strategic but doctrinal according to Qutb. Qutb’s emphasis on the adoption of a doctrinal rather than strategic method for eliminating Jāhiliyyah and establishing the Islāmic society is the result of his belief that all societies or systems are informed by a coherent and all encompassing world conception. He argues that the Muslims who set out to establish the Islāmic order must equip themselves with means that are commensurate with the all encompassing and comprehensive character of the Jāhili order surrounding them. He argues that the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) did not try to garner support for his call by adopting any strategic methods despite being a great strategist and despite the fact that he could have easily done so by catering to the interests or by taping into the insecurities or frustrations of potential allies. On the contrary, he insisted on an unyielding message of the doctrine of monotheism; “There is no god but Allāh.” Qutb emphasizes that today’s Muslims should also confront Jāhiliyyah in a similar manner without trying to devise strategies and tactics. This would help them to avoid any compromise with the Islāmic call as well as make their struggle a truly meaningful struggle. He asserts that when confronting Jāhiliyyah and struggling to bring about its demise, the active Muslim should not claim that the Islām he is promoting is an Islām that is in harmony with the order that prevails, even if such a claim is made tongue-in-cheek. When it originally came Qutb argues, “Islām never said to the people that it would not touch their way of living, their modes, their concepts and their values except perhaps slightly”. Nor did it “propose similarities with their system or manners to please them as some do today when they present Islām to the people under the names of Islāmic democracy’ or ‘Islāmic socialism’. ‘Islām and Jāhiliyyah are essentially different from each other’ and if
sometimes it appears that some parts of Islām resemble some aspects of the life of the people in Jāhiliyyah…. this resemblance in minor aspects is a mere coincidence; the roots of the two trees are entirely different.65

Jihād:

As mentioned, Qutb’s method for the establishment of Islāmic society draws from his perception of the surrounding Jāhiliyyah and his ideological wholism i.e. all societies are informed by a coherent and all encompassing world conception. According to him, the Jāhiliyyah whatever form it may assume takes the form ‘not of a theory but of an active movement’; it is an organized society and there is a close cooperation and loyalty between the individuals and it is always ready and alive to defend its existence consciously or unconsciously. It crushes all elements which seem to be dangerous to its personality.66 Qutb thus concedes that transforming the Jāhili society into an Islāmic society is an arduous task that requires struggle at two levels—the ideological and the practical. This struggle is what Qutb calls Jihad. It is Jihad according to him, which becomes a means for transforming the Jāhili society into an Islāmic society. But who are to initiate this Jihad? Qutb holds that the Jihad must be initiated by a vanguard of professional revolutionaries—the chosen elite, Al-safwa al-mukhtar from among a body of believers Usba mu’mina. The members of this vanguard according to him dedicate their whole life to this one purpose.67 This vanguard must confront Jāhili society at the ideological level by resorting to preaching and persuasion, by refuting the arguments of Jāhiliyyah and exposing its corruption. At the practical level it should amass enough power to remove the social, economic and political obstacles to the establishment of the Islāmic community. The use of force or power is justified not only by the events in the Prophet’s life and quotes from the Qur’ān but also by the nature and mechanisms of the power of the secular state in the contemporary world. Further, Qutb believes that the oppressor’s of Allāh’s servants and the usurpers of Allāh’s authority on earth will not relinquish their power merely through argument and rhetoric.68
It may be recalled that to Qutb all non-Islamic societies or Jahili societies are oppressive in essence. Therefore, Jihad as a means of eliminating such societies becomes a “universal declaration of the freedom of man from this oppression, which in concrete terms takes the form of man’s slavery to man and to his own desires. It rejects the slavery that occurs in Jahili societies and proclaims that man deserves to be free. Qutb claims that man finds his freedom in the laws of God which have come through His divine revelation. Unless man lives by this divine guidance, he will be enslaved to his own bodily desires. The best illustration of this concept comes in Qutb’s criticism of western society and culture. Because God’s laws do not define the social order, the West has misused sexuality; the family has lost its moral purpose because it has been enslaved to human impulse. In this sense, Jihad is waged to return man to his Godly purpose. It seeks to free men from slavery to their impulse, which has caused them to suffer.

Qutb makes it clear that Jihad must be waged universally, (but initiated and led by a vanguard). It is universal because all human beings deserve to be free. God does not limit Himself to a particular country, sex, or race of people. He desires that the entire human race reject Jahiliyyah and accept God’s guidance, for if the entire human race were to do so, the world will live harmoniously and in accordance with human nature. Further, according to him, Jihad creates an environment that allows Islam to prosper as a practical system of life. It creates this environment by abolishing the organizations and the institutions of the Jahili societies, which prevent people from reforming their ideas and beliefs, force them to follow deviant ways, and make them serve other humans instead of their true Lord. It is obligatory to wage Jihad against the obstacles in the way of an Islamic society because all men have the right to serve God alone. Hence Muslims are obliged to free their fellow men. If a Muslim does not wage Jihad against Jahiliyyah, he fails to recognize the right of his fellow men to serve God alone.

Qutb claims that Jihad at the practical level is waged against institutions and organizations, not against the individuals. Jahili institutions are the
enemies, not the people who live under the Jāhili system. It is these institutions and organizations and especially the government organizations that possess power over the Jāhili society and make society conform to the non-Islāmic ideals and thereby act as obstacles in the way of establishing an Islāmic society. After stating the objective of Jihad as the removal of Jāhili institutions that act as obstacles to the establishment of Islāmic society Qutb raises an important issue. This issue is the issue of compulsion. The Qur’ān explicitly states that “There is no compulsion in religion,”72 therefore, people should not be forced into conversion. Qutb concedes that the establishment of Islāmic society does not violate this commandment. In an argument reminiscent of Rousseau’s claim that human beings must be “forced to be free” Qutb maintains that coercion is justified in the pursuit of liberation from slavery: Islām has not only the right but the obligation to realize human freedom. After all the Qur’ān says “oppression is worse than killing”.73 Islām means freedom from Jāhiliyyah, freedom from the enslavement of one individual to another; freedom to exercise the freedom to choose. But freedom to choose what? Islām of course. The paradox is that Qutb both claims for Islām, the status of liberator from oppression and insists that freedom be exercised in acceptance of Allāh’s sovereignty. Qutb justifies this move by arguing that, after the constraints of Jāhiliyyah are eradicated, the only choice is the sovereignty of Allāh. For only this authority makes choice itself possible.74

Vanguard:

Qutb suggests that this struggle against Jāhiliyyah must be initiated and led by a vanguard. The Vanguard, Qutb argues ought to be modeled on the physical and political structures of its enemy. As the Jāhiliyyah is not simply a theoretical formula, but a dynamic movement in command of a society, which constitutes an organic whole, Islām itself must be embodied in a dynamic association of its own, surpassing its rival ideologically and structurally. This is the only way to possess the capability of obliterating this Jāhiliyyah.75 The Jāhiliyyah it will strive to eliminate, Qutb argues, will naturally react to its efforts with resistance and hostility. In its mildest form, the Jāhiliyyah will try
to frustrate it by insisting that valid reform or reconstruction is always predicated on the definition of a fully detailed solution to all aspects of social life, this Jāhiliyyah will ask it such questions as “What are the details to which you are calling? How much research have you done? How many articles have you prepared and how many subjects have you written about? Have you constituted the Jurisprudence on new principles?—as if nothing was lacking for the enforcement of Islāmic law except research in Jurisprudence and its details.” Such questions, according to Qutb, are mere delaying tactics for “diverting attention from real and earnest work; are a method through which the workers for Islām can be made to waste their time in building castles in the air”. Qutb suggests that it is the duty primarily of the vanguard to “expose these tactics and reduce them to dust, to reject this ridiculous proposal of the reconstruction of Islāmic law”. For a society which is neither willing to submit to the law of God, nor expresses any weariness with laws emanating from sources other than God. But beyond mere delaying tactics, Jāhiliyyah will resist and fight whenever its interests become threatened, “history tells us that the Jāhili society chooses to fight and not to make peace, attacking the vanguard of Islām at its very inception, whether it be a few individuals or whether it be groups...” The Islāmic society, therefore, can not be established without fighting Jāhiliyyah. The members of the “vanguard” are according to Qutb “true believers”, they have thoroughly submitted to God exclusively and they will grant sovereignty over their lives only to God. As their mission is to confront the prevailing Jāhiliyyah and to work towards bringing about its annihilation, they must, in their struggle against Jāhiliyyah, know how to interact with this Jāhiliyyah that surrounds them and must establish a relationship with it that will best promote the vanguard’s mission. Most importantly, the vanguard must understand that its mission “is not to compromise with the practices of the Jāhili society” nor to “be loyal to it.” Including himself among this vanguard, Qutb warns that we and Jāhiliyyah are on different roads, and even if we take one step in its company, we will lose our goal entirely and will lose our way as well. In its struggle, the vanguard
must spiritually cut itself off from Jāhili society and in general “keep itself somewhat aloof from this all encompassing Jāhiliyyah”. All loyalty to the leadership of this Jāhiliyyah must be withdrawn, whether this leadership is ‘in the guise of priests, magicians or astrologers or in the form of political, social or economic leadership.

Qutb, however, does at times hedge on his otherwise uncompromising call for the total severing of all relations with Jāhiliyyah. The Islamic vanguard should understand that ultimately its aim is to demolish and do away with the Jāhilī order, and moreover, that in carrying out its mission it should never compromise with this Jāhiliyyah. At the same time, the Islamic vanguard “should also keep some ties with Jāhiliyyah” and maintain at least a window communication and interaction with it. The abolition of Jāhiliyyah will not come about through compromise, but neither will it be fulfilled by “severing relations with it and removing ourselves to a separate corner”. Rather, the correct procedure is to mix with discretion, give and take with dignity, speak the truth with love, and show the superiority of faith with humility.

It is interesting to note that prior to Qutb, Abul-'Ala Mawdudi had stressed that there ought to be an Islamic revolutionary party whose central task would be to topple the idolatrous governments and wrest power from their representatives. Mawdudi opines that this is a religious obligation incumbent on the community as a whole. Qutb adopted Mawdudi’s idea of political struggle, signaling out lectures on Jihad in Islām as one of the most valuable theoretical contributions to contemporary Islamic thought. In those lectures, Mawdudi called for the establishment of an “international revolutionary party in order to wage Jihad against tyrannical governments”. Its members were called “the functionaries of God” and their duty would consist in wiping out “oppression, mischief, strife immorality, high handedness and unlawful exploitation from the world by force of arms.”
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81 Ibid., p.12
82 Ibid., p.48
83 Ibid. pp.139-140