Chapter Two

Life and Works of Sayyid Qutb
LIFE AND WORKS OF SAYYID QUTB

Childhood and Family Background:

Qutb Ibrahim Husayn Shadhili was a literary critic, novelist, poet, Islamic thinker and Egypt’s most famous Islamic activist of the twentieth century, exceeding in reputation even the founder of the Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949). His passionate writings contain powerful maladies of contemporary Islamic societies and an idealization of the faith through the words of the sacred texts.¹

Sayyid Qutb Ibrahim Husayn Shadhili popularly known as Qutb was born on 9th October 1906 in Mosha, a village in the district of Asyut, some 235 miles in the south of Cairo, Upper Egypt. He was the eldest among the two brothers himself and Mohammed Qutb and three sisters namely Hamida Qutb, Amina Qutb and Nafisah Qutb. His father al-Hajj Ibrahim Qutb was a very pious, middle class farmer who was well respected in the village. He was also a member of Mustafa Kaamil’s Nationalist party (النواةحزب الوطني) and a subscriber to its paper, The Banner.²

Qutb was greatly impressed by the exceedingly remarkable pity of his pious father in his very childhood. In his work, Aspects of resurrection in the Qur’an (مشاهد القيامة في القرآن) (1946), Qutb delineates the devotional and God fearing character of his father in these heart-rending words:

“Oh my father, this effort I dedicate to your soul. When I was just a kid, you ingrained into my instinct and conscience the fear of the day of resurrection. You never reprimanded me; instead in your whole life in my sight, the sense of accountability in the Hereafter would prevail upon you. Your heart and soul would always be filled with it and it was the talk of your tongue. When paying others dues you would be harsh on yourself and when receiving from others your own, you would be too polite and courteous. You would ignore others excesses even though you possessed the power to pay back and you would take it as atonement for your
sins on the Day of Judgment. You would always give others the things (if asked for) even if you yourself needed them and would say that I am amassing the where-withal for the Hereafter.

Your person (image) is imprinted to my thought. After the dinner, we find you busy in the recitation of the holy Qur’ān in the same way as would you do in your whole life, when you would send the blessings of this to the deported souls of your parents. We, the small kids would also recite along with you some of the verses from here and there, while we did not remember them fully”.

Like Qutb’s father, his mother was also a truly religious lady. She was instrumental in bringing up her children in a purely Islāmic way, inculcating in them a deep love for the divine scripture. It was her intense desire to see her children memorize, understand and recite the holy Qur’ān in beautiful and melodious voice. Recollecting the scene of his mother’s devotional love for the Qur’ān, Qutb draws this memorable sketch in his work Artistic imagery in the Qur’an التصور الفني في القرآن 1945

“Oh my mother, the whole month of Ramadhan, when the Qaris at our home in our village would recite the holy Qur’ān with their melodious voices, you would devotedly and attentively listen to them behind the curtain. I would sit beside you and make noise as the children are accustomed to. You would through gestures and signals insist me to refrain, then I would also give full ear to listen along with you. My heart would be delighted by the bewitching melody of the words, though beyond the scope of my comprehension

As I grew under your care, you sent me to the village primary school, your greatest desire was that Almighty Allāh open my breast and I memorize the holy Qur’ān besides grant me with a sweet and charming voice and I recite the Qur’ān every time before you. As your wish was fulfilled and I memorized the Qur’ān, then
you put me on the track which I own now. All this made a part of your desire complete.

“Oh mother, your little babe, your young sweet-heart presents the fruits of your teaching and guidance before you, though it lacks the beauty of recitation but perhaps does not lack in the beauty of interpretation”.

**Education:**

God had endowed Qutb with a sharp memory and mental faculty. He was barely ten years old when he memorized the whole of Qur’an. His educational life started from a traditional madrasah of his village Mosha. However, considering the more organized system of education and the clean environment of the government schools, he was soon admitted in the government school of the village. He completed his primary education in this school in 1918. In 1919, he went to Haluan-a suburb of Cairo for further education; here he lived with his maternal uncle Ahamad Hussayn Uthman, who was a journalist. Ahmad Hussayn Uthman had close liaison with the famous Egyptian literary personality Abbas Mohammed al–Aqqād. Both were members of the Wafid party founded by Sa’ad Zaghlul and had regular visits to each other as they lived in the same vicinity; Aqqād in Misr al-Jadid and Ahmad Hussayn in al-Zaytun. On several occasions Qutb accompanied his uncle in his visits to al-Aqqād, and was astonished by the dynamic personality of al-Aqqād, his thought, his writings, his intellectual ability and his remarkable library which contained various kinds of books in both Arabic and foreign languages.

Al-Aqqād had ostensibly remarkable impact on the literary life of Qutb for a long period of nearly twenty five years.

Because of the 1919 revolution in Egypt, Qutb had to delay his studies for two years before he was enrolled in 1921 in “Tajheezia Dar al-ulum” in Cairo. This Dar al-ulum prepared students for admission in Dar al-ulum College Cairo (Cairo University). From 1925 to 1928, he graduated in teachers’ training college. He also
apparently attended classes informally in 1928 and 1929 at *Dar al-ulum* (established in 1872 as a modern Egyptian University on the western model). In 1930, he was formally admitted to this institution and graduated in 1933 with a BA in arts. In recognition of his accomplishments, he was appointed instructor at the *Dar al-ulum*. However, he earned his living between 1933 and 1951 mainly as an employee in the Ministry of Education, where he held the post of inspector towards the end for few years. Qutb renounced this post in 1953 on account of his disagreements with the government educational policies as well as on account of the government’s submissiveness to the British.

**Visit to USA:**

As an inspector of schools in the Ministry of Education, Qutb was deputed to USA in 1948 with a government delegation to “study the curriculum of American Universities”. Qutb stayed for two years and few months in the US during which he visited Wilson Teaching College of Washington, Colorado’s Teachers College and Stanford University. During his visit, he also earned an M.A in education from the Colorado’s Teachers College.

Qutb left USA in summer 1950 and visited England, Switzerland and Italy on his way back to Egypt in 1951. His trip to the US was a defining moment for him, marking a transition from literary and educational pursuits to intense religious commitment.

After returning to Egypt from the United States, Qutb wrote his three part essay *The America I have Seen* in 1951. He did acknowledge America’s vast technical expertise and economic progress. But found it abysmally primitive in the world of senses, feelings and behavior. Qutb was appalled by the racism, sexual permissiveness and pro-Zionistic feelings of the Americans. Much of the essay *The America I have Seen* is devoted to issues involving sexual mores. “The American is very primitive in his sexual and in his marital and familial relationships..."
and for Americans sexual relations have always conformed to the laws of jungle. The American girl is well acquainted with her body’s seductive capacity. She knows it lies in the face, and in the expressive eyes, and thirsty lips. She knows seductiveness lies in the round breasts, the full buttocks and in the shapely things, 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.\footnote{10}

The description of Qutb makes it clear that he is disgusted with the American woman who not only leaves her body uncovered but also consciously uses it as a weapon. By using their bodies in this manner, women are prone to be treated by men as sexual objects rather than dignified child bearers. While Qutb has harsh words against the American woman’s seductiveness, he also criticizes the way that American men use 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”.\footnote{11}

This explains what Qutb argues is the “sexual primitiveness” as he saw it in the U.S. Qutb’s experience there produced a culture shock that made him more religious and convinced him of the moral decadence of the West. Apart from narrating his experiences in America in his essay, \textit{The America I have Seen}, he gave a summary of his view on America in his most influential work \textit{Milestones (معالم في الطريق)}, thus:

“Look at this capitalism with its monopolies, its usury... at this individual freedom, devoid of human sympathy and responsibility for relatives except under the force of law; at this materialistic attitude which deadens the spirit, at this behavior, like animals which you call ‘free mixing of the sexes’ at this vulgarity which you call ‘emancipation of women’, at this evil and fanatic racial discrimination”.\footnote{12}
Qutb also felt betrayed in America, when he saw anti-Arab and pro-Jewish coverage in the news papers and movies that fostered contempt for Arabs and Muslims.13

**Joining Al-Ikhwān Al-Muslimūn:**

Qutb’s trip to USA proved to be decisive. The detrimental consequences of the materialistic way of life as observed by him in America strengthened his belief in the truth and perfection of Islām. He returned to Egypt with the firm belief that true welfare of humanity lies in adhering to the letter and spirit of Islām. After reaching Egypt, he joined *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* in 1953 and was appointed as the editor of its weekly paper, *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (الإخوان المسلمون). Subsequently, not long afterwards, he became the director of *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*’s propaganda section and was chosen to serve on its highest bodies, the working committee and the guidance cell.14

**Imprisonment and Demise:**

In January 1954, the government banned *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* and imprisoned many of its key figures including Qutb, because of their increasing criticism of the Nasser regime’s domestic and foreign policies. The decree was rescinded three months later.15

An assassination attempt on President Nasser on October 26, 1954 and the suspected involvement of *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* behind this act, led the government to launch a massive crackdown on *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, arresting about a thousand members and affiliates of *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*. Seven of the leaders of the organization were accorded death sentence by the public courts (محاكمات الشعب). Six of them were executed while as the death sentence of Ismail Hussain al– Hudaibi (1915–), the then supreme guide of *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* was commuted to a life imprisonment.16
Included among the convicted was Qutb, the chief ideologue of *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*. He was put behind the bars despite his frail health due to intense fever. In the Jail, he was tortured brutally by the police. The police used to torture him so harshly that they would pour hot water over his body and follow it with chilling cold water. They would harass him by exposing him to a swarm of trained terrible dogs and by giving him fire touches; they would also torture him mentally through indecent and obscene gestures and by frequently transferring him from one Jail to another. This inhuman and barbaric torture aggravated further the frail condition of Qutb. As a consequence, he was admitted in a military hospital on May 13, 1955. On July 13, the public court sentenced him to a fifteen year imprisonment. However, all this barbaric torture could not stop Qutb from using his pen against despotism and falsehood. Whenever he found comfort in the prison, he devoted himself to writing about the truthfulness of Islām. He wrote his two most popular works *In the Shade of Qurān* and, *Milestones* while he was in the prison.

When this harshness failed to derail Qutb from his stance, the Egyptian authorities resorted to subtle yet more sinister means to dissuade him from his bold advocacy of a just and truthful Islāmic order. The government sought to arouse cupidity and greed in him. A representative of President Nasser made a proposal to Qutb, “If you make a plea for forgiveness which shall be published in the news papers, then you will be released from the prison”. Qutb, however, rejected it, and said to him, “If my arrest is just, then I am content with just decision and if it is unjust still then I am not going to beg before falsehood for my acquittal”. In a similar attempt, the government proposed to coronate him with the coveted Ministry of Education in lieu of making a public plea for forgiveness. To its utter disgust, government’s this proposal too was boldly rejected by Qutb, saying that “accepting this post would tantamount to compromising with the falsehood against the truth”. When Qutb rejected such offers one after another, the government redoubled its
efforts to curb Qutb’s bold advocacy of truth by unleashing a fresh and renewed course of severe torture on him. At last, because of his continually deteriorating health, Qutb was released in 1964 at the behest of the then Iraqi president ‘Abdul Salām Aarif after spending ten harsh years in the prison. The government, however, imposed restriction on his free movement.¹⁷

Not long after his release from the prison, Qutb was again arrested in August 1965. This time the government alleged him of preparing an armed revolt against it. Along with Qutb, about 20,000 members and affiliates of Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, including the family members of Qutb were also taken into custody and were subjected to brutal physical and painful spiritual torture by the Nasser regime. Qutb’s eventful life came to an eventful end in August 1966 when he and many of his colleagues were hanged.¹⁸ Most of the Muslim world remembers him as a martyr, who sacrificed his life for a just cause.

A Literary Critic:

Qutb’s works, pervasive as they were, demonstrate that he had studied extensively and meticulously. His opinions, thoughts and spacious genius cover numerous fields, whether these are literature, poetry criticism, narrative, journalism, philosophy, history, psychology, politics, oratory or Islām. “The literary potential of Qutb had obviously emerged during his village life. In Cairo he studied literature in the pre-University programme at Dar al-ulum and thereafter at the college. In fact, his literary life virtually began in the literary school of al-Aqqād who had serious concern for reforming Arabic literature”.¹⁹

Qutb was endowed with high qualities of beautiful and thrilling expression in an inspiring and influencing manner, covering with it his living experience to his readers. He did not produce a literary masterpiece except after experiencing it by himself. He also gained experience by real efforts in his feelings and sensations. He was truthful in transferring this experience in full to the readers to make them read on
the development and provide a picture for them from the feelings and sentiments that were experienced by him for decades. His soul was not content with the hypocritical literary work. He was endowed with natural talents and outstanding potentials which were a witness to his literary acumen in transferring and transmitting the reader’s feelings and sentiments. He authored thirteen literary works. The literary masterpieces *Child from the Village* (طفل من القرية), *The Thorns* (الأشواق), *The Enchanted City* (المدينة المشهورة), *Stories of the Prophets* (قصص الأنيباء) and *The Four Corners* (الأطياف الأربعة) are the major publications that indisputably substantiate the gifted talents of Qutb in the world of Arabic literature.

He demonstrated critical insights and analysis at an early age of his literary life. In 1933, Qutb published a book on literary criticism titled *Importance of Poets in Life* (مهمات الشاعر في الحياة), which consisted of a series of lectures in *Dar al-ulum* auditorium when he was a third year student. His teacher Muhammad Mahdi Allam, wrote a preface to this book and eulogized Qutb’s outstanding traits and recorded his admiration of his personality, courage, confidence and his equilibrium. Although, he differed with him in some of his views, he considered him as an object of pride for *Dar al-ulum* and explicitly declared that he felt proud to have Qutb as one of his students.

Though Qutb appeared to be harsh in his literary criticism yet he was always courageous in presenting his views. He was clear in documenting his thoughts in a balanced manner in all the subjects he dealt with and the models that were demonstrated by him. The people witnessed several campaigns of his literary criticism through various journals such as *The Week* (الأسبوع), *The Pyramids* (الأهرام), *The Message* (الرسالة), *The Culture* (الثقافة) or *The Arab World* (العالم العربي). Publication of his literary articles and delivery of lectures in literary conventions received great recognition and admiration of all intellectuals and scholars of literature. Some of these articles were later on collected and published in 1946 in book form titled,
Chapter Two

*Books and Personalities* (كتب وشخصيات). Qutb’s apparent respect for scholars is obvious in his dedication of his literary works to scholars, poets, researchers and literary historians who have been endowed with the knowledge of literary criticism.\(^{21}\)

Among the literary personalities with whom Qutb interacted and left a great impact on him, mention may be made of Abbās Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād, Taḥā Hussain, Ahmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt, ‘Abd-al Qādir Hamzah, Ahmad Zāki Abu Shadi, Tawfīq al-Ḥakim, Ibrāhīm Aḥmad al-Qādir al-Mazīnī, Yāhya Ḥaqqī, Muḥammad Taʿīmūr, Muḥāmmad Mandīr, Aḥmad al-Ḥamīd Jawdāh al-Sahḥār, Aḥmad Amīn, ‘Abd al-Munʿīm Khallāf, Abbās Ḥādīr ‘Alī al-Tantawī, Anwār al-Muʿīddawī and Najīb Mahfūẓ. Abbās Muḥammad al-ʿAqqād in particular played a key role in shaping Qutb’s literary proclivities. Al-ʿAqqād was one of the most famous upholders of literary reform and rejuvenation in Egypt. His remarkable literary competence began to emerge in his childhood. He started to write in journals and magazines about the beginning of the 20th century. He was regarded as the leader and savior of literary criticism in Egypt, as his critical and analytical articles were collected and compiled in the form of famous works.

Qutb began to develop his relationship with al-ʿAqqād at an early age, when he stayed with his uncle Ahmad Ḥussayn Uṭhman. He went on to become an ardent disciple of al-ʿAqqād. He used to frequently visit al-ʿAqqād’s large library and followed his Friday morning intellectual and literary seminars. He began to attend it in 1920 and continued for more than twenty five years. He became famous in the world of literary criticism as a devoted admirer of al-ʿAqqād. Some writers commented, criticized and defamed him for his discipleship. Qutb admired al-ʿAqqād to the extent of obsession and loved him to the point of jealousy. He admitted “I do not deny that I was in severe attachment to his person to the extent of obsession, and that was the result of correct understanding of his works and deep agreement with his thoughts”.\(^{22}\)
However, in the course of time Qutb developed differences with the literary school of al–Aqqād and gradually disregarded it, renounced it and eventually founded a new literary school, which reflected unique concepts, views and sound methodology in poetry, literature, arts and criticism. Numerous literary personalities extended their appreciation for him. He was firm in founding his new school. He developed, maintained and reinforced it with new sharp distinctive concepts. It cited that Allāh, exacted is His praise, opened his eyes towards new features and ways. He therefore became a dynamic thinker, writer and researcher of this new literary school. It was only in the last stage of his life that he devoted himself totally for Islāmic revival.

**MAIN WORKS**

Qutb left a rich legacy behind him. He wrote some forty books and numerous articles and poems in several magazines *The Week* (الأسبوع), *The Pyramids* (الأهرام), *The Message* (الرسالة), *The Culture* (الثقافة) or *The Arab World* (العالم العربي).

However, his works pertaining to Islām can be viewed under three phases. Phase I reveals his literary prowess in the form of

i. مشاهد القيامة في القرآن *Aspects of resurrection in the Qur‘ān.*

ii. التصوير الفني في القرآن *Artistic imagery in the Qur‘ān.*

iii. في ظلال القرآن *In the Shade of Qur‘ān.*

Phase two not only evinces his deep understanding of different aspects of Islām but also his prolific way of inviting the world to Islām with sound, effective and unambiguous arguments. In these works Qutb appears to criticize the eastern and western blocks and attempt to explain that “Islām” is the only option for the Muslim community (*Ummah*) to excel. The most famous works written during this phase include.

I. العدالة الاجتماعية في الإسلام *Social justice in Islām.*

II. معركة الإسلام و الرأسمالية *Battle between Islām and capitalism.*
Books written in the third phase portray Qutb to be a mature Islamic thinker and preacher. These books, written after his trip to America and several European nations, kindled fire against the despotism and ignorance, enticed people to unite and strive for the establishment of Islam. These works also delineated the perimeters of Islamic concept and Islamic organization. They also tend to assert that Muslim Ummah today can hope to regain the same level of perfection which it attained during the life time of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and that of the four pious caliphates provided, if it adopts the same methods as were adopted by the first generation of the Muslims. Qutb wrote flamboyant works such as *Milestones*, *This religion of Islam*, *Islam the Religion of Future*, *Islamic Concept and its Characteristics*, and *Islam and the Problems of Civilization* during this phase.

Aspects of Resurrection in the Qur’an (1946):

In this work, Qutb discusses a particular theme, namely, the artistic portrayal of the Qur’an of the Day of resurrection. Qutb says that this is the second book, after the *Artistic Imagery in the Qur’an*, in which he aims at rediscovering the charm of the Qur’an as it was felt by its first recipients the Arabs who understood it in a pure and simple fashion. As he writes:

“The far reaching goal is to represent the Qur’an, revive its pure and artistic beauty; salvage it from the ruins of interpretation and complexity, and (thus) distinguish it from other goals and purposes mentioned in the Qur’an including the religious goal. Thus, my objective here is purely artistic, influenced only by the sense of an autonomous artist. If the end results (of this work) were the meting of sacred art with sacred religion, this would not be my intention and it would not influence me. Rather, this would be an implicit characteristic of the Qur’an.”

25 World peace and Islam: Islamic Studies.

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Qutb discusses the origins and evolution of the doctrine of the Afterlife as it appears in the writings of ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. He then moves on to discuss the genesis of this idea in the eastern traditions, especially in Hinduism and Buddhism. He contends that although the doctrine of the Day of Judgment was not a major principle of the Old Testament and early Judaism, it played a crucial role in the New Testament and the life of Christianity in general. Christian theology is elaborate in its distinction among the kingdom of God, eternal life, hell and heaven. Qutb was not interested in discussing the similarities or differences between the Islamic perception of the Afterlife and that of the Christian. However, he contends that, although there were many Jews and Christians in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam, the whole doctrine of the Afterlife was alien to the pagan Arabs. Qutb wrote that Islam portrayed the Day of Judgment in a dynamic way, and made the Arabs believe in the Afterlife, heaven and hell, absolute justice and mercy. Consequently Islam revolutionized their terminology, principles of cognition, and practices. In a nutshell, in *Aspects of Resurrection in the Qu’ran*, Qutb does not discuss the historical or political reference of the Qur’an. His sole concern in this work resides in elaborating a significant characteristic of the Qur’an that had been intentionally or unintentionally neglected by Muslim scholars and jurists.

**Artistic Imagery in the Qur’an (التصوير الفني في القرآن)**

Along with *Aspects of Resurrection in the Qur’an*, Qutb goes beyond preaching art for art’s sake in this work of Qur’anic aesthetics. He maintains that the Qur’an creates meaning – or establishes a web of meanings – that can easily be detected if one studies its imagery, representation, music and syntax.

As a young boy growing up in a traditional village and listening to the recitation of the Qur’an, Qutb was in no position to comprehend its epistemological principles and abstract ideas. What mattered was the artistic imagery that the different verses stirred up in the heart of the little boy. “My young and naive imagination” says Qutb,
“magnified the images expressed by the Qur’ān. Although it was a naive imagery, it stirred me and regaled my sensitivities. I would always treasure an animation”\(^{28}\).

Qutb laments over the fact that the liveliness, dynamism, and engaging images he remembered so vividly from his village life disappeared in his adulthood because of the demanding nature of existence. “Alas! Its signs of beauty have disappeared, and feelings of sweetness and yearning have drawn thin”. Qutb was caught between these two impressions of the Qur’ān. The first was pure, smooth, uncorrupted and musical; and the second was complicated, fragmented and devoid of insight.

In manhood, Qutb returned to Qur’ān with a new feeling. “I have returned to my Qur’ān by reading it, but not in the books of exegesis. And I have discovered my beloved and beautiful Qur’ān and found my sweet and longing images – images without the original naivety. I have come now to comprehend its purposes and goals”\(^{29}\).

Qutb holds that the history of Qur’ānic exegesis has failed to present a comprehensive theory of Qur’ānic aesthetics. According to him only two Muslim exegetes–al-Zamakhshar and al-Jurjani–came close to conveying the aesthetic meaning of the Qur’ān. Both discussed the inimitability (اعجاز) of the Qur’ān, and they laid the foundations of a general, although unsystematic theory of Qur’ānic aesthetics. Generally speaking, however the main artistic features of the Qur’ān remained hidden and unexpressed.

What is an artistic representation? Qutb argues that artistic expression of representation is preferred method of Qur’ān. It expresses in a correctly imagined way an abstract mental meaning, a psychological state of mind, a concrete event, a lively scene, or a human representation. Further more, the Qur’ānic method of representation conveys a concrete sense of life, giving it an almost real personality. In this manner, the Qur’ān converts abstract ideas into shapes or movements,
transforming psychological states of mind into mental paintings or scenes, and thereby magnifying the abstract and unseen truths of human nature.

In the Shade of Qur’an (في ظلال القرآن) 1953

It is a comprehensive and wide ranging Qur’anic exegesis that has mustered a wide and quite heterodox audience in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world. In its original form, In the Shade of Qur’an comprises a unique compendium of tafsir (Qur’anic exegesis) spanning some eight volumes.

Qutb began to compose this tafsir in 1951 and completed it during more than a decade of his imprisonment.

Qutb’s tafsir enjoys a reputation as one of the most popular and reader-friendly tafsir available. This is attested by the fact that it has been translated into English, Persian, Urdu, Bengali, Malay and Turkish.

Overall, the appeal of this tafsir rests on its author’s skillful use of literary methods to generate interest in an ideologically charged interpretation of the Qur’an. It conditions its adherents to see a bipolar world of difference and division pit between pure Islam and modern paganism.

Unlike traditionalists (traditional Muffassirun), Qutb does not list all the variant interpretations relating to a particular verse and mechanically indicates his preference. Qutb himself did not seek to be compared to the traditional mufassir. Nonetheless, traditionalists accuse him of deviance, in not following the basic criteria of tafsir and instead practicing tafsir madhmum (blameworthy interpretation). In his introduction to the English translation of part 30 of “In the shade of Qur’an (في ظلال القرآن), Muhammad Qutb the brother of Sayyid Qutb observes: “The book is a campaign of struggle” because it is indeed much more than a commentary on Qur’an.

Qutb was not interested in addressing a western audience or the political and social elite of Muslim nations. He found little positive to say about western
civilization and culture and cultivated a conscious and unapologetic supremacist posture. A key audience for him are all those who identify themselves as Arabs but are asked to forget their Arabness to help carry “the message of a forceful and all comprehensive faith, (to be) delivered to humanity with mercy and compassion. More broadly Qutb targets a wider Muslim audience or at least the buried sense of religious identification in his intended audience. He is certainly not writing for an audience of ‘Ulamā’ or clerics, but the home moyen sensual who has lost his way in the thicket of modernity. Qutb’s own stated objective in writing the “tafsir” was to produce a document that spoke directly to Muslims and would be lodged in their consciousness.

His tafsir would serve as a living guide for a true Islamic society to emerge, which Qutb explains in the following way: “We need, more than ever, to perceive the Qur’ān as propelling dynamic and lively document…it no longer represents in our consciousness that type of life that actually took place on earth in the history of the Muslim community. We do not remember any more that the Qur’ān was the daily preoccupation of the recruited Muslim from which guidance for action and execution were derived. The Qur’ān has met its death bed in our consciousness… What is required is for the Qur’ān to establish in the Muslim consciousness and life”. Qutb is not interested in scholastic quibbling, but seeks to turn his reader’s mind to the problems confronted by the religion as it was revealed in its original context. As Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi puts it in his perceptive analysis of Qutb exegesis, “The Qur’ān must be understood, not for the sake of accumulating more knowledge or its artistic beauty, but for the sake of a personal and political revolution”. At another level Qutb’s tafsir is also addressed to the select few, or the vanguard, who have begun to carry out the political revolution, rather than the average returnee to Islām who has just initiated a revolution of conscience.
The operational effectiveness of Qutb’s *tafsir*, however, lies in its arrogation of a specific role in this process, as a form of *tafsir al-haraki* (dynamic exegesis) that seeks to revive, energize and move the masses from passivism to a reawakened sense of their Muslim identity and on the basis of this towards activism.

**Social Justice in Islam** (العدالة الاجتماعية في الإسلام) 1947:

This work written in 1947 is about the social justice in Islam. This is Qutb’s first work where he discusses Islamic thought and civilization. This work has been published and republished in about seven additions and in each edition Qutb made some changes and additions in accordance with his current study. The book has been translated into several languages including English, Urdu, Persian, Turkish and Indonesian. Its English translation “Social Justice in Islam” has been published by American council of learned Societies, Washington in 1953. In view of the author, the spirit and disposition of Islam is more important than its laws and it is this spirit and disposition of Islam which provides or forms the fulcrum on which the Islamic system stands. In this work, the author has paid much attention to this spirit. ³⁶

The author goes on to argue that “we can not comprehend the nature of social justice in Islam until we have first studied the general lines of the Islamic concept of Divinity, the Universe, life and humanity, for social justice is only a branch of that great principle on which all Islamic teachings are based”. ³⁷

True Islamic thought can not be found in the writings of Ibn Sina*, al-Farabi (AD 878-950)**, Ibn Rushd (AD 1126-1198)*** or in the writings of other such philosophers whom the World calls “the philosophers of Islam”. Their philosophy is only a shadow of Greek philosophy which in its spirit proved to be quite foreign to

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* Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn ‘Abdullah ibn Sina, Persian physician, the most influential philosopher-scientist of Islam.
** Muhammad bin Muhammadi Tarkhan ibn uzalagh al- Farabi, also called Abu Nasr al- Farabi, Muslim philosopher, one of the preeminent thinkers of medieval Islam. He was regarded I the Arab world as the greatest philosophical authority after Aristotle.
*** Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Rushd, influential Islamic religious philosopher who integrated Islamic traditions and Greek thought. He wrote commentaries on most of Aristotole’s works.
Islam. Islam has its own true and complete philosophy which can be derived from its sources—Qur’an, Hadith and the life of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). The basic concept of Islam (Tawhîd) from which all other teachings spring in the form of laws, rituals and deeds, can be easily and safely found by any researcher within the innate sources of Islam. One of the distinctive features of this book is that the author has made an attempt to separate the history of Islam from that of the Muslims. The act of judging or checking the Muslim history by the touchstone of the spirit of Islam has earned for Qutb a distinct and unique place. In the seventh chapter of this work, the author has included some examples from the history of Islam which are a vindication to the permanence and continuity of the spirit of Islam. They inculcate this fact that the religion of Islam is not a sacred memory of the past but is relevant and practicable today as well. Since its inception it has influenced every period of Islamic history. In author’s view the world today is in search of a new system of life which can provide it with a right faith and a just social system. This vacuum can be filled only by Islam. According to him, the principle of harmony is Islam’s unique feature and it stands against any kind of polarization, be it physical, material, spiritual doctrinal or practical. “Islam came to unify all powers and abilities, to fuse together spiritual aspirations and bodily desires, to harmonize their directions and thus create a comprehensive unity in the universe, life and man.”

In Qutb’s view, Islamic social justice is more comprehensive than economic justice. The Islamic view has two considerations. First, man is looked upon as one unity, both spiritual and physical, and the body is not disgraced on behalf of the spirit. Second, social life should be based on mutual love and respect. There is, in society, the absolute and just, coherent unity and mutual responsibility.

The Islamic theory does not recognize social stratification, and it stands against the cult of personality in matters of its political philosophy. “According to the Islamic theory just as the encroachment upon society by the cupidity and ambition of
the individual is a kind of social oppression which is inconsistent with justice, so too
the encroachment upon the nature and ability of the individual by society is also a
kind of injustice. It is an injustice, not to the individual alone, but to the society as
well.

**Battle between Islām and Capitalism (معركة الإسلام والرأسمالية):**

This work of Qutb is about the battle between Islām and capitalism. It was
first published in 1950. It became very popular among the Egyptian masses in
particular because it launched a vehement criticism against the despotic capitalist
system prevailing in Egypt at that time. The popularity of this work among the
masses is attested by its frequent republication in 1952 and 1966 in the form of
second and third editions respectively. At the time of the publication of its first
edition, the British and the Pashas had embarked on a vicious plunder of Egypt and
the labourers and farmers had been subjected to vagarious forms of atrocities by
them. Qutb could not tolerate this heartrending situation of his country and he took it
upon himself to challenge the exploitative, capitalistic system patronized by the
corrupt regime of Nahash Pasha.

Except Abul Khair Najeeb—the editor of al-Jamhur al- Misri, and a member of
Wafd party- and Ahmad Hussain the president of Hizb Misr al-Fatah, no other person
had challenged this despotism at that time. Though both these writers criticized the
capitalist system of Egypt, their writings lacked that clarity and the support of
Qur’ānic guidances which adorned Qutb’s *The Battle between Islām and Capitalism.*

The publication of this work was a huge blow to the tyrannical capitalist
system of Egypt. The role of this work in the military revolution of 1952 of Egypt
was so much appreciated and praised that some Egyptian writers declared him to be
the “Marabou of Egypt”. “Marabou” was the French author who had been enticing
French masses to bring about revolution against the capitalism and despotism
prevailing in France prior to the French Revolution of 1789 AD. A revolutionary spirit is easily discernable in Qutb’s *The Battle between Islām and capitalism*.

The second edition of this work was published in April 1952 just three months before the military revolution. The masses bought it so eagerly as if it contained the remedy for their daily suppressions and harms suffered by them at the hands of the despotic regime of King Faruq. The book was an open revolt against the tyrannical rule of King Faruq. Faruq’s government was overthrown and the military took over the control of Egypt. The newly military regime, however, followed the foot steps of the previous government and started to “sell old wine in view bottles”. The masses thus, faced a new form of tyranny. But Qutb’s book was a declaration of war against all forms dictatorship. The third edition of this book was published in 1966 and the masses again showed tremendous eagerness for getting a copy of this book.

**World Peace and Islām (السلام العالِمِي والإِسْلَامِ)** 1951:

In this work Qutb describes the only way to achieve a real universal peace. Having lived in the West and observed how personal interests dominate all aspects of materialistic life devoid of spirituality, Qutb discusses with his deep, insightful and comprehensive understanding of Islām, the unique yet comprehensive approach of Islām to establish real and everlasting universal peace.

How does Islām build Islāmic personality? What are the characteristics of this personality? What role does Islām play in shaping the society? What does the belief in Allāh, the Day of Judgment and accountability do with that? Why is Islām a comprehensive way of life that encompasses the human character and ethics, the social system, political power and economic system? What are the duties of an individual and that of the state government? And what is the relationship between the state and religion? The genius and inquisitive mind of Qutb discusses hundreds of such questions and provides convincing answers in this book.
Qutb makes it clear in this book that the Islamic teachings have created peace in human nature. Islam instills its notion of peace in the soul of man via faith, which then proceeds to create peace in the conscience, the household, the society and ultimately culminates in international and universal peace. Islam's this notion of peace first addresses the conscience of man and reminds him of his responsibilities. Then it proceeds to create peace in the family within the ethical and legal limits. Then it goes to strengthen the feeling of security in the society by ensuring social equilibrium by establishing individual and collective norms, and legal justice and peace and security. And finally when such efforts are made at the global level, Islam accomplishes its goal of establishing peace through Jihad against the atrocious and tyrannical powers and by eliminating the elements which disrupt peace and security.

According to Islam, the relationship between the individuals of a society is based on love, mutual responsibility, cooperation, and peace and security. Islam establishes the principle that the basis on which the life of all human beings is based is the mutual balancing of rights and duties, just distribution of benefits and responsibilities and right proportion between labour and wages. Islam also says that the purpose of all these is to ensure a sustainable and progressive life. The motive behind all these activities and intentions should be to please Allah, the Creator of Universe. It is from here that each individual and collective act and organizational effort is directed towards a wholesome and comprehensive peace and security.

In the view of the author Islam does not confine its appeal to the conscience of man alone rather in order to achieve its objectives and establish peace and security in the society it combines the means of order and consent, and legislation and persuasion. It guarantees justice and at the same time takes the responsibility of peace and security in society. It establishes government and ensures that there is a just, peaceful and cordial relationship between the ruler and the ruled.
Chapter Two

It is these true relationships that act as a fulcrum for a true and strong edifice of peace and security in the society.

In chapter “World peace”, Qutb appears to emphasize the fact that it is the obligation of Muslims to eliminate oppression in all forms, be it an oppression of an individual over himself, of a group over itself or of a government on its subjects. Islam is duty bound to eliminate oppression and its causes from the world. It is because of this responsibility of Islam to eliminate oppression in the world that Jihad assumes a significant place in Islam. In Islam the Jihad is a means for bringing about a universal revolution (to eliminate oppression and injustice) rather than a means for expanding ones rule and amassing wealth.

In the last chapter of this book, the author has called for establishing notion of national and international peace as upheld by Islam.

The first edition of this book was published in 1952. Since then it has been published continuously, indicating the popularity it had among the masses.

Towards an Islāmic Society ( نحو مجتمع إسلامي) 1969:

This work is essentially a collection of a series of articles and lectures of Qutb—all related to one and the same topic; “What are the basic elements and outlines of a Muslim society? How an Islāmic society can be established and what is the identification of an Islāmic loving society”?

All the essays of this work have been published in the journal, The Muslims (المسلمون) which was first released in 1951 from Cairo. These articles were finally compiled into a book namely, Towards an Islāmic Society ( نحو مجتمع الإسلامي) in 1969.

In the very beginning of this book, the author has made it clear that the purpose of Islam is very important, pure, broad and unambiguous. Its objective is not merely confined to the welfare and salvation of the Muslim Ummah rather it aims at preventing the whole humanity from falling into the quagmire of gruesome problems and crisis. Today, the whole humanity is gripped in sufferings and anxieties. It is
Islam only that can eliminate sufferings of humanity if it sincerely adheres to it. If we understand reality and essence of our call (invitation), the importance of our objective and the purpose of our existence, then the whole world is seeing our path; we can solve its problems, and by forging its relations with its Creator (we) can prevent it from the failures it witnesses in this world and most likely to witness in the Hereafter if it does not mend its ways.

Qutb seems to emphasize in this work that the Islamic system is not a past story, nor has it been added to history as a mere beautiful drama (story); it as been active in every era in one and has been affecting the humanity. Today too such evidences are there which indicate that the Islamic law remains lively today (as it was during the period of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his companions) and can solve the intricacies of modern age and guide mankind in the affairs of life and death.

Qutb also discusses the distinctive features of Islamic society in this work. According to him, the first distinctive characteristic of Islamic society is that it is based on the laws made by Allah Who alone possesses the knowledge of the problems and needs and the interests and desires of all human beings. He is the God of whole humanity and He knows no discrimination among the human beings. The second distinctive feature of Islamic society is that the basics are quite clear there while the other aspects have been left open for ijitihad. This society is divine wherein justice reigns supreme. This society is a universal society. It is not a transient or timely society. Nor is it confined to any particular region. Its rules and laws are universal. The whole humanity benefits from such society and all possess the right to reap the fruits of their faith and blessings in this society.

This Religion of Islām (هذا الدين) 1954:

In this work, the author has attempted to clarify the objections and doubts regarding the religion of Islam and its operation in human life. He has also highlighted the possibilities of its viability, capability and operation in the present
times. The faith of Islām being a divinely ordained path for human life, why then does its realization in the life of mankind depend on the exertions and efforts of men themselves, within the limits of their human existence in a given environment? Why doesn’t Allāh cause it to operate in human life in a miraculous manner? When like other systems of life, Islām too depends on human efforts for its realization, what then is the need to strive for the establishment of this religion alone? What is the basic and essential difference between Islām and other systems of life? What are the distinctive features of the Islāmic system of life? Why is it obligatory to work for the realization of this religion in human life? The author has given quite satisfactory answers to all these questions.

Why must we make efforts for the realization of Islām in our life? Answering this question, the author says that Allāh has chosen that His divinely ordained path for human life should be realized through human exertions, within the limits of human capacities. He has chosen thereby to raise human being to a point of excellence corresponding to the exertions he has made, the abilities he has applied, and the patience with which he has met misfortune for the sake of realizing this divinely ordained path, of removing evil from himself and from life around him.

The only way to implement this religion is that there be group of people who undertake this task (of implementing it), believing in it completely and conforming to it as closely as possible, trying to instill and penetrate it into the hearts and lives of others too, striving to this end with all that they possess. They struggle against human weaknesses and temptations within themselves; they struggle against those whom weakness and passion impel to resist divine guidance. They attain thereby, in the realization of the divine path, a point made possible by human nature and permitted material realities. They begin with man as he stands and do not neglect his actual state and demands as he passes through and traverses the stages of the divinely ordained path. This group will triumph over their own souls and those of others at
times, and at other times will be routed by their own souls and those of others, in accordance with the efforts they make and the means they chose for the battle, suitable for the circumstances and the needs of the age. More important in determining victory or defeat is however, the degree to which they truly, in them, represent this path, and are able to give it practical expression in their personal conduct and behavior.\(^{39}\)

Regarding the distinctive features of the divine path of Islam, the author has highlighted the following points in this work:

i. This is the only path which respects the nobility of man, grants him true freedom and releases him from slavery.

ii. It liberates (men) from the servitude of (other) men and invites them to the servitude of God, for servitude to God releases man from servitude to others.

iii. Islam is the only path which is free of the results of human desires, human weaknesses and human self-interest. It is free from any attempt to gain self-interest by means of legislating for the benefit of that individual, his family, class, people or race.

iv. It is only through (following) this path that true, complete and comprehensive justice can be obtained, that justice which can not be reached by any human, man-made system.

v. This is the only path which is based on comprehensive view (knowledge) of the existence of man, his place and status and of the true purpose of his existence – not as it is defined by the ignorance, weakness and illusion of humanity.

vi. This is the path that alone is in conformity with overall plan of being.\(^{40}\)

For Qutb, Islam demands that the absolute control over human beings belong to God and the path ordained by God; it denies this control to any of God’s creation, and to any path laid down by any one other than God. It considers this to be an act of
complete infidelity, and a clear ascription of partners to God. Islam also prescribes the erection of an Islamic society in the aegis of which the Muslim individual can live his religion, in accordance with the character given him thereby. But Islam proceeds gradually in accordance with human nature. It encourages human nature to take one direction, discourages it from taking another direction, and strengthens it when it weakens. But it never breaks or destroys it, or attempts to do so. It is patient with it as the wise and the knowing are patient, like him who is confident of the realization of the long-term aim, which can not be obtained in one rush, or even in two, three ten, a hundred or a thousand! All that is demanded is the exertion of effort to progress along the path.

Towards the end of this work, Qutb stresses the fact that if humankind is merely invited again to the path of Islam, it would appear foreign to it and would be disliked by it. What is required is that the Muslim Ummah understand its special duty and go ahead after strengthening its true character. It should not forget to take the where-withal of journey. What is that “where-withal of journey”? Qutb’s answer is that it is only one thing i.e. the fear of Allah, consciousness of the reality of God, action in accordance with His Will and an absolute trust in His explicit promise “The victory of the believers is a duty incumbent upon us”.

Islam the Religion of Future (المستقبل لهذا الدين) 1954:

This book was first published in 1974 from Dar-al Shuruq, Beirut. It is divided into seven chapters. This work seems to emphasize the fact that the welfare of humanity lies in Islam alone, because it is a divine religion that was sent by the Creator of universe for the guidance of mankind through His messengers. The final and complete form of this religion was given to mankind through the last messenger Muhammad (S.A.W). Because the Creator of this religion is the same Allah who created the whole universe, therefore except this religion no other religion can
guarantee the real welfare of humanity. The good of humanity is inherent in the sincere obedience of this religion.

According to Qutb, throughout its long history, Islām has endured and withstood blows more violent and more sinister than those directed against its pioneers everywhere at the present. With its own resources of power and its intrinsic vitality, it struggled through all, emerged victorious, continued to survive and preserved the communities and lands under its protection, even doing so without a sophisticated armory.44

The second chapter of this work is very important. In this, the author has attempted to unveil the fact that every religion is a system of life. There is a strong correlation between the social order and the ideological order of any religion. In fact still stronger than this strong correlation is the basic biological emergence of the social order from the ideological ideal. The social order, with all its characteristics, is an offshoot of the ideological ideal. It grows biologically and naturally and is completely adapted in accordance with the assessment of life which that conception demands relative to the human situation, state of existence, and the goals of man in this life. This type of growth and evolution are in the right course of things; indeed, such is the only course. No social order could naturally and righteously emerge and establish itself unless it derives from a realistic conception of the facts of life and the ends of human existence.

**Milestones** (ملاحقات):

Qutb is best known for his *Milestones* (ملاحقات). It was first published in 1964. Gilles Kepel describes it as "the Islamic equivalent of Lenin’s "what is to be done"."45

*Milestones* marked the completion of Qutb’s transition from an Islāmist to a radical Islāmist and established him as the twentieth century’s most important Islāmist thinker and writer.
In this work, Qutb lays down a revolutionary manifesto for Islamic activists. Like most contemporary revivalists, he was distressed with the growing distance between Islamic values, institutions and practices, and the emerging post colonial Muslim societies, especially in his native country Egypt. In *Milestones*, he sought to answer some of the fundamental questions such as “why Islam needs to be revived”? Why no other way of life is adequate? What is the true essence of an Islamic identity and an Islamic existence? How Islam was established by the holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his rightly guided companions? Can the same method, which was undoubtedly divine in its conception, be replicated or repeated now? Qutb seems to be particularly concerned with this issue of “Islamic methodology” for establishing Islam again in the same way as was done by that “unique generation of the Muslims”. He believes that Islamic values and the manner in which they are to be realized, both together constitute the faith of Islam.

Relying entirely on the Qur‘ân, Qutb uses the concepts of Jâhiliyyah, Islamic concept, Islamic methodology, Jihad and Allâh’s sovereignty to delineate the strategy by which Muslims would:

i. Realize the true significance and implications of the most fundamental article and proclamation “there is no god but Allâh, having faith in the exclusive Oneness of Allâh.

ii. Understand the imperfections, injustices and poverty of Jâhiliyyah.

iii. Empower themselves by realizing the meaning of أشهد أن محمد رسول الله (bearing witness that Muhammad (S.A.W) is Allâh’s messenger)-internalizing his method of Da’wah and submitting to the will and laws of Allâh.

iv. Through this Islamic methodology, as articulated in the Qur‘ân and manifested in the practices of Muhammad (S.A.W), which does not demarcate theory from practice, and discourse from action, establish an Islamic society
Chapter Two

or Islamic order—the Islamic order which is Allāh’s most significant gift to the entire humanity.

The most remarkable aspect of Milestones however, is the author’s insistence on an approach in “stages” and the repeated assertion that the need for implementing Islamic law would not arise until every member of the community had completely submitted to the sovereignty of Allāh and by that agreed to live under Allāh’s laws. Laws would then be framed merely to serve the needs of this “living community of Islām”. It is worthy to note that Qutb was not the first to use the term “Jāhiliyyah” in his work. The term is usually used to describe the Arabian Peninsula as being in a state ignorance prior to the advent of Islām. Qutb applied this term to contemporary societies. Prior to Qutb, it had been used by Mawdudi and also by Sayyid Abul Hassan Ali Nadwi in this context. However, whereas Mawdudi believed that the world was a mixture of Jāhiliyyah and Islām, Qutb believed that the world was either one or another (No mixture).46

Qutb maintains in this work that Jāhiliyyah is not the pre-Islāmic historical era of paganism,-as usually understood-it is an ever present condition of denying Allāh’s rule, usurping His “greatest attribute of sovereignty”, and living by man-made laws that enslave men to their rulers and engender oppression and tyranny. The first step towards renewal is to judge all societies, institutions and regimes by these criteria. All those that do not fulfill these criteria are proclaimed Jāhili. Qutb goes on to fetch a list of Jāhili societies in a somewhat hierarchical order of their Jāhiliyyah character. The communist societies according to him top the list and the Jewish, Christian and contemporary Muslim societies not living by divine law follow the list. No Islāmic society exists in the world today.

Qutb proposes a two pronged strategy for revival. The Muslims must engage in the proclamation of the message (Da’wah) and simultaneously establish a true Muslim community (Jama’ā) that will serve as the vanguard (taliya) of renewal.
Qutb goes on to dedicate his *Milestones* to this vanguard. However, he does not say much about the vanguard except that it must carry the message of Islām by “marching through the vast ocean of Jāhiliyyah” which has encompassed the entire world. Elsewhere he envisaged that the vanguard would be confined to the “chosen elite” who will lead a life-and-death struggle against the opposing forces.

**Islam and Problems of Civilization (الإسلام و المشاكل الحضارية 1962):**

This work is an erudite research about the problems of modern civilization and their solutions in Islām. It was first published in 1962 from *Dar al-Ihiya al kitab al-Arabia*.

The author expresses a philosophical thought in this work. In order to prove what he considers to be the plight of modern man from an Islāmic doctrinal perspective, Qutb quotes lengthy versions from French scientist Alex Carrel’s “*Man the unknown*”. Evidently Qutb was impressed with Alex carrel’s insight into the meaning of man’s existence, and especially man’s situation in western civilization.

Alex Carrel contends that the West has not paid sufficient attention to the study of man ---- his consciousness, spiritual and mental activities, whims and desires and that the West is far more advanced in general, in the spheres of technology and hard sciences than it is in the field of psychology. Qutb and Alex Carrel invoke an oft repeated thesis current in early twentieth century western thought, and best represented by the American philosopher William James, “for a hundred and fifty years past the progress of science has seemed to mean the enlargement of the material of universe and diminution of man’s importance”\(^47\). Although men and women have joyfully welcomed modern civilization because of the material comforts it has to offer, modern man is not as well balanced, emotionally and intellectually, as was the classical man. In Carrel’s view “modern civilization seems to be incapable of producing people endowed with imagination, intelligence and courage. In practically every country there is a decrease in intellectual and moral caliber of those who carry
the responsibility of affairs”. Carrel, therefore, contends that the predicament of modern civilization lies in its inability to produce men of sufficient intelligence and courage to guide it along the dangerous road on which it is stumbling. According to him “modern civilization finds itself in a difficult situation because it does not suit us. It has been erected without any real knowledge of our own nature. It was born from the whims of scientific discoveries, from the appetites of men, their illusions, their theories and their desires. Although constructed by our efforts; it is not adjusted to our size and shape”.

Qutb follows the footsteps of Carrel and contends that the polarization of man into the spiritual and the material is the result of the victory of science over religion. Man must be treated as an indivisible whole. Alas! this is not the situation of man in advanced technological societies. Modern society ignores the uniqueness of the individual and his strong commitment to freedom. Qutb expresses agreement with Alex Carrel and assumes that modern man lives in a spiritual, mental and psychological chaos and in uncertainty about the future. Opposed to this ignorance about man, Qutb argues that the Qur’anic conception of man treats every individual as unique being endowed with a divine mission.

Qutb claims that the reason behind the ignorance concerning the nature of man in the industrial world is simple. It was brought about by the historical conflict between the church and the men of science. According to Qutb the principles of scientific research developed in Muslim Spain (Andalusia), and the pragmatic scientific method originally developed by Muslims was borrowed by European scientists, such as Roger and Francis Bacon.

Assimilating the Muslim scientific method, the European mind excelled in natural, geographical and cosmic discoveries. The church from its standpoint of defending the myths and superstitions of the Middle Ages opposed the discoveries in the name of God and sacred. In fact the church moved to protect its own interests——
interests that were closely associated with the environment of the Middle Ages. As a result the men of science moved away from the religious domain and its spiritual mysteries so that their science was set apart from the absolute. Qutb thus blames the church for driving the men of science away from God. In the light of this polarization between science and religion in the west, Qutb investigates three major issues in the life of man in this work. These issues are (1) man’s nature and temperament (2) gender issues and (3) the question of social and economic systems. As far as the issue of man’s nature and temperament is concerned, the author has proved through the quotes of several modern thinkers that Darwinism is superfluous and baseless; it demotes man from the privileged status divinely assigned to him, and reduces him to an animal. According to Qutb man is a unique creation in this universe created for a purpose and with an aim. He enjoys a particular nature that stands above the nature of other animals and that enables him to fulfill functions no animal may fulfill. As a result, he enjoys a noble status equaling the nobility of his mission.

As far as the second issue of gender is concerned, the author holds that the inconveniences and the anxieties arising from a wrong notion regarding women and the relation between two sexes are no less than the anxieties and inconveniences arising from a wrong notion regarding the nature and temperament of man. Then the author delineates the position and status of woman in the light of Qur’anic teachings and states the guiding principles of mutual relationship between the sexes. He goes on to criticize the position held by women in ancient civilizations, rejects the excessively otherworldly thought of the Christian Rabbis and at the same time attacks the modern western thought of consumerism. He makes it clear that the influence of Roman thought and civilization on the West can be easily discerned. In a nutshell, Qutb articulates a particular concern on the issue of gender differences in this work. It is the animalistic or materialistic reductionism of the modern civilization that leads to a blurring of the divinely ordained differences between the male and the female.
While the male and the female do share in the same humanity, and therefore, stand on the same footing in their respective rights as human beings, they are nonetheless divinely charged with different duties and obligations.

The author throws a critical and quite an investigative light on third big issue of humanity namely, the issue of social and economic system. On the one hand the author has attacked the European capitalist system and on the other hand he has declared the economic interpretation of history to be antagonistic to humanity and has rejected the economic philosophy of Marx, as it is detrimental to humanity. The author holds them as two extremes which formed the basis of capitalism and that of communism. Both these failed to solve the problems of humanity. A system which is based on wrong notions about man and is oblivious of man’s reality can not be immune from all these harms. So long as there is a wrong conception about man, his nature, his temperament, his purpose of existence and his sphere of influence, all their relations would remain disoriented and extreme. In particular the social and political relations would remain so because these are directly affected by the conception about man.

In the analysis of the author, the modern civilization is inimical to mankind. But what should be our decision regarding this civilization? Should we declare its end – a punishment commensurate to the crimes it produces? The author’s answer is clear. No. Because this civilization did not emerge out of a mere incident rather it emerged in a particular era of history to fulfill the biological needs of man, therefore, its roots are deep and despite triggering horrible crimes against humanity, it is not plausible to declare an end of this civilization.

The only solution is to gain more knowledge of ourselves...But the problem with Carrel, (according to Qutb) is that he is after all a westerner, who grew up in a western culture, and who is therefore, informed by its long history and its prevailing present, a present heavily dominated by the notions of modern science...He is a
prisoner of this culture, its conceptions, its history and the patterns of its life”. The solution to this problem, in the eyes of author is Islām; which is not opposed to science but it does not entrust the task of constructing human life to science. Instead, it delineates spheres of intellect and science and prescribes limits for them to act within these limits.

In the words of the author, “Our Islām is not confined to spiritual activities – besides which carrel is not aware of any other dimension – rather Islām makes the whole life its battlefield. It expresses itself in every aspect of life. Islām prescribes the limits of life and it rotates within these limits. Intellect and science, Industry and economy and politics, prayers etc- in short all aspects of human life remain bounded around this orbit of Islām within the limits it prescribes. Islām considers religion to be a code of conduct for human life and it tells that this code is prescribed by God Himself and that His pleasure can be earned by living in accordance with this law or code of conduct”. But humanity accepts only that way of life which is manifest in the society. The author ends with a remarkable analysis that “thousands of works written regarding Islām, hundreds of lectures delivered on it in the mosques and in the fields, several films made about the preaching of Islām and numerous delegations dispatched from Azhar etc for preaching Islām – (the fruits of) all such efforts can not be equal to a small society which is established in some part of the world, where Islām is active and which has existed for Islām alone, in which all features of Islām are manifest and in which Islām acquires a practical form of life”.

**Islamic Studies (دراسات إسلامية), 1953**

In this book, which is essentially a collection of articles written between 1951 and 1953, Qutb evinces a stronger commitment to the *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* movement. In this work, the author’s ideas revolve around such themes as revolution, liberation, Americanization, Arab nationalism and Islām. Elaborating on his notions of social justice, Qutb perceives Islām as a “great emancipator revolution” that led to
far reaching break through in the spiritual, social, economic, military and literary realms of human life. Islām is devoted to freeing the masses from atheism, religious fanaticism, racial and ethnic discrimination, social and economic exploitation and political privileges. However, it is the task of the conscious intellectuals, such as Qutb himself, to raise mass consciousness and elevate the masses to the inevitable conflict between them and their oppressive conditions. Qutb defines Islām as a method of confronting averse and oppressive conditions. The birth of a genuine Muslim takes place in the most critical moments of human history. Indeed, a Muslim is empowered with a special mission to fight injustice.

The author views Islām as a revolutionary religious system that stands against all passive and quietist manifestations of modern life. Once it touches man’s heart, Islām is supposed to cause major changes in feelings, perceptions, and conceptions.

The author also comments on what he perceives as the partial and incomplete attempts of Muslim leaders to apply Islām in the realm of education and law. He criticizes these attempts on the premise that Islām is complete and indivisible whole that must be applied in its entirety. He contends that Islām refuses to be consulted in trivial matters while it is neglected when it comes to basic issues.

The author’s more general previous criticism of Christianity and the West is narrowed down to a more specific critique of Americanization, its symbols and its intellectual allies in the Muslim lands in this work. In provocative essay entitled “Americanized Islām” the author accuses America of being patronizing Islām and Muslims because of its perceived need to combat the communist threat in the Middle East. America does not oppose Islām per se. However, the type of Islām it nurtures is the castrated one.

“The Americans and their allies in the Middle East reject an Islām that resists imperialism and oppression, and opt for an Islām that resists only communism. They neither desire nor tolerate the rule of Islām. This is the case because, when Islām
begins to rule, it will mould the people anew, and instruct them that it is a (legal) duty to both prepare for assuming authority and expelling the colonialists.  

The author goes on to argue that “Americanized Muslims” control the most sensitive posts in society, and their decisions are likely to affect the future course of the Muslim world.

“Americanized Muslims” are always ready to render any service, big or small, to their imperialist masters.

In the author’s view, the most dangerous of “Americanized Muslims” happen to be certain famous Egyptian authors, journalists and professional men of religion who become aware of the significance which imperialism attaches to their position, and thus subscribe to ideas inimical to Islam.

In another important article entitled, “The principles of the free world”, the author reacts strongly to claims that the western world is the locus of freedom and equality. “The free world” he maintains, “is just a name that British, French and American colonialists use to describe the imperialist block which has been fighting against (the progress of) time, humanity and freedom”. In his view the characteristics which distinguish the so-called free world include (1) killing real freedom in the world; especially in North Africa and Vietnam; (2) committing crimes in Africa in the name of civilizing black people; (3) dislocation of nations and creating permanent refugees, such as in the case of Palestine and (4) pouring millions of dollars into the control of the minds of the indigenous people. The most dangerous thing facing the indigenous people of the third world is the attempt of the western World to brainwash and mind control.

“The free world does not fight us with tanks and guns except for limited periods of time. Instead, it wages a battle against us with tongues and pens....It also fights us though the (charitable) societies and organizations it establishes, revives, and supports for the sake of controlling the most sensitive centers in our land”.

75
Qutb takes his analysis a step further and develops the concept of “intellectual and spiritual colonialism. This type of colonialism (latent colonialism) drugs out the spirits and minds of the people and turns them into obedient slaves. Revolution is a necessary outcome of colonialism. “Holy war against colonialism today necessitates the emancipation of the conscience of nations from spiritual and intellectual colonialism and the destruction of those systems that drug out the senses and being cautious of any tongue, pen, society and group that concludes a truce with those colonialisnt camps which are bound by common interests and principles”.

**Islamic Concept and its Characteristics (خصائص التصور الإسلامي و مقوماته) 1962:**

This work was first published in 1962. Since then several editions of this work have been published, earning immense popularity. Narrating the reasons for writing this work, the author writes in the preface of this work:

“It is the need of the time to bring out clearly the Islāmic concept and its characteristics and distinctive features because every Muslim ought to know a comprehensive interpretation and explanation of life, in the light of which he would lead his life. It would also enable him to understand God, Universe, mankind and the realities of human life, with which he is deeply associated. What is the central place of man in this Universe? What is the purpose of his existence? Why has been he made nobler to other creatures? He ought to know the answers of all these questions so that after understanding the relationship between the creator and the crated, man fulfils his mission”.

The moment a Muslim learns the disposition and nature of Islāmic concept, its characteristics and distinctive features, he would become a sound element in the construction and revival of the Ummah, which would have the capability of guiding the humanity and taking it out of the depth of infamy, because it is this ideological concept which drives humanity towards a particular system, it is on the basis of this ideological concept that individual and social activities are performed and it is this
ideological concept which leads humanity in all fields of its efforts. But our approach in this research and work should be to benefit from the Qur’ān in the foremost and study that environment and the civilization in which Islām was revealed. We should also be able to comprehend the evils and deviations which spread because of their apathy from divine guidance. No conscious decision should be taken prior to the study of Qur’ān. Instead of moulding Qur’ān into our preconceived thought and scheme, we should try to construct and mould ourselves in the light of Qur’ānic injections.

Secondly, a person who does not have the determination to strive and sacrifice, and does not have the courage to face the challenges in leading an Islāmic life will not benefit completely from the Qur’ān.

In the Chapter, “Adversities and Misguidance Galore” the in-depth analysis of the author leads us to the conclusion that today the complexity of innumerably large faiths, conceptions, philosophies, superstitions, customs, organizations and institutions have blurred and have made it difficult for us to distinguish between truth and falsehood, Shirk and Tawhīd, and between real and superfluous. It is only the light of Islām that can help us come out of this quagmire of crisis and guide us to truth and thereby guarantee us a success in this World as well as in the Hereafter.

In the subsequent chapters, the author has discussed in detail all the characteristic features of the Islāmic concept one by one. The first and the foremost characteristic of the Islāmic concept, according to the author, is its divine character (ربانية) i.e. it is from Allāh. The code of conduct, being the creation of Allāh, the Creator of the universe, it is free from all human weaknesses and shortcomings. Allāh has made and prescribed it not for any particular community, group, religion or race but for the humanity as a whole.

The second characteristic of this concept is its consistency and firmness (ثبات). Islām is not as weak as to give in to our wishes and inducements (to ensure its
viability). On the contrary it is based on strong, unwavering and firm principles and it is we who are supposed to follow it. It does not, however, disregard the realities and needs of our life at any moment and keeps the doors of *ijtihad* open for human intellect to cater to the needs of the time without relegating it to back seat.

The third characteristic of Islāmic concept is its comprehensiveness (شمول) and illimitability. The Islāmic concept informs people about their Lord, about “His person” and “His glorious attributes” and about “What pertains to Him alone as distinct from what pertains to His creation”. It also informs (them) concerning the nature of the universe in which they live, its properties and its relation with the Creator and tells (them) about life and living, informing them concerning their respective sources. Moreover, the Islāmic concept addresses in detail the human condition and provides answers to man’s deepest existential questions.”

The fourth characteristic of the Islāmic concept which the author discusses in this work is the “balance” (توازن) of this concept. In fact the author sees the beauty of Islām in its balance –balance between known and unknown, between spiritual and mundane, or between relations between God and man and above all the balance between the activity and positions of man and the universe. On the one hand Islām emphasizes mankind to strive for earning bread and on the other hand it puts strict restraints on taking to extravagance and luxury. This attribute of “balance” in short, adorns Islāmic teachings concerning all affairs of human life. The Islāmic concept also informs human beings about man, describing his origin and his source, his nature and his characteristics, his place in this existence, the purpose of his existence, his position of servitude to his Lord, and the requirements of this servitude. It follows that Islām because of its comprehensive character, takes interest and interferes in all affairs of human life, religious and mundane or secular, or political and spiritual or concerning war and worship.
The fifth characteristic of Islāmic concept according to Qutb is positive ness (إيجابي) Islām grants man a positive role in this universe. The spirit of Islāmic concept prompts man to action and movement. His action in the system of earth is not of a derived and negative nature. He is basically created as deputy and vicegerent of God.

The author lists the sixth characteristic of Islāmic concept as “realism” (واقعة). The author concedes that the Islāmic teachings are not utopian that have nothing to do with the practical. To him, Islām goes beyond the realm of thought to address both thought and more importantly the practical aspect of human life. In Islām any endeavour to delve in thought is only for the sake of shaping and ameliorating the practical part of life. Qutb notes that Islām provides an opportunity for humanity to benefit and he cites the example of the generation of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) and his companions who availed of this opportunity to the fullest possible extent and thus benefited. In his view, Islām is continuously throwing open this opportunity for humanity. However, humanity can avail of this opportunity as long as it strives for eliminating the corrupt conditions and circumstance in which it is gripped.

Islām does not tolerate and does not allow such corrupt conditions and circumstance to sustain. In place of excess and contempt it wants humanity to return to the middle path of rectitude and guidance, and to their pristine, uncorrupted nature.

The author ends the work with a discussion on the principle of “Tawḥīd” and its effects on human life. In his view, all the characteristics of Islāmic concept spring from the concept of “Tawḥīd”. It is this principle of Tawḥīd, which creates the spirit of action and movement in man, leads him to firmness and consistency, and preserves the comprehensiveness of the Islāmic concept. The characteristic of “balance” of Islāmic concept owes its origin to the principle of ‘Tawḥīd’. In short all the blessings and benefits of human life proceed from this principle of “Tawḥīd”.

79
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