

BEFORE we start discussing the problem of change in and towards a Muslim society, please permit me to sound my reservations about the word revolution itself, which is supposed to be an important ingredient of my talk.* To those of you who expect to be handed out any recipe for a Molotov cocktail or a kit on revolution, I must offer my apology at the very outset.

The very word revolution which, today, a great many have come to regard as a sort of senseless, a magic solution to their personal and social problems is a chaotic and a rather trite concept. The fact that it has found a place in the contemporary Muslim parlance makes it no more apt than the expression 'Islamic Crusade'. Literally, figuratively and in actuality, revolution means no more than turning round, and round and round... ad infinitum. The word and the concept that flows therefrom are both trivial and vulgar.

Without going into the semantics of change, let's be clear about some basic questions. Is it really necessary to seek a change? And if a change is to be sought, then the existing state should be changed in relation to what?

Since we are talking about an Islamic change or a change according to Islam, let us refresh ourselves as to what Islam is?

In simple and precise terms Islam is the belief in oneness and supremacy of Allah and willing obedience of His commands. Man has been created in a state of natural goodness, given the faculty to discriminate between right and wrong, and the freedom to choose either. Not left alone to grope in instinct and desire, God provided man with guidance through sending his authorised representatives—prophets and messengers, to teach and to demonstrate through personal example and practical guidance. These individuals were given the faculty and the felicity to invite people to that which is good but not to coerce or to impose.

Since God is not a part-time deity or one who shares his powers with one or more of his kind, the guidance He provides is comprehensive, universal and eternal. He would be a very selfish God who knew everything but told His best creation, man, nothing but how to praise Him and not help him in the conduct of his life, in the home, in the market, in the courts and in the parliament. If you believe in an Almighty, all-knowing and wise and kind, it is logical to accept Him as the source of guidance. And since God is God in his own right and not because we appoint or elect him to be so, therefore, His knowledge and authority and guidance are not time or situation bound, these are absolute and eternal. They are absolute and eternal, but one is free to accept or not to accept although after having recognised Him as the Deity, one is downright silly to say that look God, you are not progressive enough, what you told Muhammad 1,400 years ago is now old and out of date.

The position of man, according to Islam of course, is that of a *de jure* vicegerent and a *de facto* sovereign, i.e., he is required to discharge his commission as a caliph of God but he actually has the freedom to behave as a sovereign, though that would be without a lawful authority.

This freedom and autonomy given to man is not unlimited. It has a life-time tenure, after the expiry of which one is accountable for the use and misuse of this lease of independence. This freedom, this tenure, and then the accountability, the judgement, the reward, the punishment and the hereafter, all these are an integral, indeed a logical part of the scheme of things. This is the scheme of Islam. One may accept it or deny it. One may like it or not, the scheme is there, it operates, nevertheless.

That is Islam, but a Muslim is one who accepts the scheme and proceeds to behave and to act accordingly. From the guidance he received through God's Messenger, begin and flow his personal as well as social commitments in all spheres of his life and for the whole period of his life. It shapes and colours his whole firmament of life: from what and how to eat, to marriage, and death, and commerce, and justice, and government. For him these norms and values are both the yardstick and the objective. These constitute the basis of his social concern as well as the urge for change.

REVOLUTION AND RENOVATION

The problem of change in and towards a Muslim Society

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Now what happens when a person or a society which had temporarily alienated itself from Islam decides to return to its pre-alienation state, i.e., the state of Islam? Whatever way one may denote this change, this is not rotating in full circle, this is not revolution. This is the restoration of the *status quo ante*, this is return to normalcy, which is what *tajdeed* really is—to be new and to be normal.

One does appreciate the position of those who call for revolution. In a limited sense, this would be true if you believed in some sort of original sin and in intrinsic sinfulness, or in being the chosen one; or in a stone or a metal or a wooden god; or transmigration of the souls etc. All these involved a belief in some sort of other of a deity, but since they lacked the confidence and guidance necessary to lead a normal day to day life, a life with purpose and with hope, and since this eluded them they either felt or were driven to feel that the remedy of their situation lay in rotating and revolving not just once, in fact the theory is of a permanent revolution.

But, as I mentioned earlier, revolution in the Islamic sense is nothing else but return to or restoration of normalcy in respect to man's relationship with his environment and his Master.

And from here on we may start discussing the problem and methodology of change, which I may emphasise again, is the restoration of normalcy.

Talking about change, one has also to be clear about the existing situation which one wants to change or to remedy.

Briefly and precisely the situation is like this. A large part of the world does not really know about it at all, it does not realise what it is missing. The only problem it knows is that of grappling with its state of endemic abnormality. This to my mind is the general picture of the non-Muslim world. If we go into a little detail, we find this assortment to be composed of those who do not know and do not want to know; of those who do not know but would like to know; of those who know something, but are confused because what they know does not match with the realities of the Muslim world; of those who feel that they know, but what they know is distorted and prejudiced; and finally those who know well what Islam really is but are opposed to Islam for the very reason that they know it and know it to be against their personal or professional interest.

Coming to the home-truth, i.e., the traditional Muslim world the situation there too, is far from normal. In fact the abnormality there is more

easily discernible. Summarily, it is a state of schizophrenia, a state of split between what it intellectually knows to be right and true and what is the effective process of the society. It is a split personality and a truly reactionary society. Reactionary not in the sense the self-proclaimed progressives classify it, but in that a great part of its life dynamics is given just to reacting to situation imposed by extraneous and external factors or those created through its own ineptness and inadequacies. The Muslim society too is composed of the same social complex which I mentioned earlier. They are: those who do not know and do not want to know; those who do not know but would like to know; those who know but are confused because what they know does not match with the realities of the Muslim situation; those who know but have a distorted picture and this gives them a terrible inferiority complex; and those who know and are opposed to Islam for the very reason that they know it to be against their personal desires and interests.

There is of course one additional strand. It comprises those who do know and since they know they find themselves committed to strive and to bring about a change to Islam. And those who no doubt know but they are what is now known as the silent majority—meek, and prayer-full, but lacking in courage, and confidence. Like the Chinese monkey, would speak no evil, would hear no evil and would see no evil. They would sit and pray and curse—pray for the miracle to happen, curse the enemy's guns, and wait for the Mahdi to arrive and set the world right for them. In the end if nothing like that happens, it is the fate!

There is, however, one basic difference between the complex in the Muslim world and in the non-Muslim world and that is the factor of state authority. The fact that the state-apparatus in the non-Muslim world composed of the assortment we mentioned earlier, has a less profound implication for the change methodology than in the case of the Muslim world. In fact the state-authority complex in the Muslim world is far more complex, and this complexity is compounded by the fact that a significant part of it is unreal and extraneous. I am referring here to the phenomenon of the continuing colonialism. This colonialism is not only political and economic, it is also educational, social and cultural.

The significance of this factor is, I hope, obvious. Obviously the nature of the problem and nature of this debate would have been much different if in calling people to normalcy, one was in a position to point out and show that there does exist a state of social normalcy.

Where do we go from here? Does one start with the non-Muslim world or the Muslim world? The ignorant majority or the silent majority?

There is a view, and I do not deny the force of it, that the natural area to concentrate is the Muslim world. It does provide you with an existing and a starting base. At least you do not start with telling the people that there is no god but God and Muhammad is his Messenger. Anyway, the movement for the establishment of Pakistan based itself on this very view and the desire to create a model state.

As I said, there is both merit and force in the argument, yet, I do not see any qualitative difference between one's commitments to and within the Muslim and the non-Muslim world. If Islam is one indivisible whole and if it is the normal and happy state for the whole mankind, then this classification between the Muslim and the non-Muslim world is only situational and no more. In talking about the non-Muslim world, particularly the areas known as the Western world, one cannot even otherwise overlook the fact that Muslims now form, may be a microscopic but a significant part of this world. The normalcy of this world is part not only of their accountability before God but also their own and their posterity's well-being. In talking about the non-Muslim world, one need also to purge his mind of the romantic idea that the Western world, sick and neurotic as it is, is set and poised to accept Islam, just as some people from time to time convert to hippyism, radicalism or Hare Krishna. This is not so, because the way to normalcy, to *hedaya*

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is not the way of reaction. It's not the destination where one arrives by floundering about. There has to be a will and the desire to receive and to reach *hedaya*.

In trying to assess and identify situations, it is natural to seek parallels from situations in the past particularly from the life of the Prophet. The popular division here is between the Meccan phase and the Medinite period of his work. We, however, need to consider two points in this regard: first, the situation we face today is not exactly the same as faced by the Prophet in any particularised phase of his work and second, our own division and understanding of his work into a Meccan and a Medinite phase is notional and more or less a tool of convenience. Now I do not see a situation anywhere in the world which could be termed as exactly and congruently Meccan or Medinite. On the contrary one would find situations to be composed of varying degrees of both the Meccan and the Medinite situations. So, the parallel with and guidance from the Prophet's work has to be drawn in an aggregate and total sense and adopted as applicable. For example, it would not be correct for a Muslim, say in Britain or in India, to say that here we are in a Meccan phase so we would do only this much and not do that which came to be revealed to the Prophet in Medina. Similarly a person in a Muslim country cannot be oblivious of the aspects of work that were more prominent in the Meccan period. The revelation having been completed and the fact that the situations now are really mixed situations, they have to be dealt within the totality of the experience and example.

Islamic work—presenting and practising Islam—would appear to be simultaneous and co-extensive both to the Muslim and the non-Muslim world. They are not mutually self-exclusive.

Now the question of change. I had said at the very beginning, I would not be offering any formula, or a kit for revolution. What we have done so far is to discuss what Islam is and the situation Muslims face in relation to bringing about any change to the State of Islam. The answer to the problem of change should not be difficult. The answer to the question of Islamic change is to be a Muslim oneself and start telling others how good and nice it is to be a Muslim. This is not being simplistic but simple it is no doubt.

Unfortunately an important element of modern human subnormalcy is its social myopia. While your goal may be just in front of you but you are conditioned to expect to be told in a complicated and an involved language; just how to get there. Perhaps this is a kind of defence mechanism against the stigma implicit in being either stupid or lethargic or both in reaching for that which is so simple and within one's easy reach. This may be a digression, but it is true of the modern civilisation as we confront it today. Efforts are directed towards complicating instead of simplifying problems and situations. To any problem you face, there are hardly a few who would admit that there is a simple answer. It is in this context that one can appreciate the typical Muslim response: "Yes Islam is good, but you know, it is not easy either". Then he goes on to recount the problems of colonialism, zionism, capitalism, CIA, communism and what have you, but in effect he is saying that it is difficult for him to live and lead his life as required by Islam. All that is plain excuse. This class of our modern day elite is not only incapable, it is also dishonest. And this is also a problem in change.

The answer to the question of change, is to be a Muslim and invite others to share the joy. What does it mean? If one looked into his own experience and tried to retrace his steps towards Islam, he would easily discover the process and the steps that helped him reach Islam. Every individual experience is not exactly the same but if we collate and put together the experience of a cross-section, we would find that this involved removal of ignorance, impartation of knowledge and motivation. These were achieved either through individual efforts and personal example and or group action. So the formula to emerge is: information, motivation and organisation i.e. remove ignorance, impart knowledge, provide

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motivation and give organisation. That is the way to change.

I think I can close my submission at this point but let me also discuss the question of the place of violence in bringing about an Islamic renovation and what would be the criteria of evaluation in the process of this renovation.

The subject of violence and the place of violence in bringing about a change has been a favourite theme all the world over and I would say it arises basically from the existing state of deprivation, suppression and helplessness over a great part of the world particularly the so-named Third World, where it is all the more acute. It is argued and argued with force and sincerity that to renounce violence unilaterally, to impose upon oneself non-violence and law-abidingness not only defeats revolution but it is also unrealistic in the sense that where you have the phenomena of illegal and tyrannical regimes, what law one is supposed to abide by. The answer to this last part is not complicated, it is the law of Islam that one is supposed to abide by.

Now as far as Islam is concerned before getting involved into the controversy between violence and non-violence, let us be very clear about it that Islam is not and is not intended to be an imposition. One knows clearly that a person cannot be forced into Islam. If someone tries to do that, he would not be a Muslim in the law of Islam. Had this not been so, there was no need to gift man with autonomy and free-will. It was not beyond the powers of God to have made all of us compulsive Muslims. But Islam is not intended to be a mere label, it is both belief and behaviour. One can pretend to believe as many do, but he cannot behave unless he really believed in it.

A change can possibly be forced upon, as is the situation in many parts of the world, but a change which does not enjoy the consent and the conviction of the people involved can be brought about only through coercion, intrigue and deceit. And if it comes about, it is a state of more oppression, more tyranny, and more deceit. Naturally, it does not produce liberation, it produces regimentation and minority control.

It may be useful to note here that while Islam seeks to achieve its social aims through harmony and integration, Capitalism bases itself on free enterprise and what it calls division of labour, and Socialism on conflict and class division. It's questionable how much different these two are from the earlier institutions of serfs, slaves and castes. These conflicts and these divisions are an inevitable infliction of a system established through and based upon minority control. The minority in trying to achieve more obedience and more conformity would embark on a never ending process of structural social and economic change. The proletariat ends up with losing everything except its chains, but it is doubtful if the ruling minority too is able to achieve anything worthwhile for itself. The whole process of coercive change whether it is termed innovation and progress or permanent revolution is an exercise in futility and unhappiness. The very relativity of

the word progress and the very transience implicit in the theory of permanent revolution is a clear admission of the inadequacy and confusion surrounding the two, which are actually one in origin and quality. Don't we see the ridiculous situation of socialism starting from a position of socialising the means of production with a view to an eventual communal ownership, now trying to foster competition and ownership i.e. small capitalism. On the other hand the classical capitalist society is trying to become more and more socialist. What better admission of failure could there be.

That is one aspect of change brought through violence and as an imposition, but one part of the original question related to the problem of tyranny where no legal or quasi-legal remedy was available. The answer to this is neither yes nor no. Islam believes in peace and order. It does not believe in non-violence as an end in itself. On the contrary it sanctions and obligates *jihad* as a means of self-defence, removal of tyranny and establishment of justice. What it is so strictly concerned about is that violence does not lead to anarchy or replace one tyranny with another. Then the use of violent force is not permitted at the level of the individual. For instance there is no place for an individual to go and assassinate or even hurt people he does not agree with. As far as I understand such a defiance of authority has to be open and declared, and with the rider that it should have the capacity to succeed, because otherwise it may lead only to bloodshed and anarchy. Where the Qur'an permits *qital*, it does not say go and slay, it says; "slay and be slain". This "be slain" is, to my mind, vastly significant, and significantly missing from all modern-day militancy. If the permission is only to kill one can expect a gregarious mass of cowards turning up brandishing their guns and knives but if it is an invitation to "be slain", it brings only those who are strong and disciplined in their minds and character, those who are interested not in the pleasure of killing but in removing injustice.

What is the measure of success and what is the standard of achievement in the process of renovation? It is a very important question and one suspects a degree of confusion and a consequent frustration on the point. This is caused partly by the unfulfilled emergence during the post-World War II years of a number of Muslim States from Indonesia and Pakistan in the East to Algeria and Morocco in the West. As the rallying cry during the independence struggle was Islam, hopes were raised that this would lead to an automatic establishment of the Good Society. Since this did not happen, some now get to doubt the very validity of Islam as a social and consequently a personal goal of life. I am afraid, it has to be accepted that the goal of establishing the corporate Islamic society remains yet to be achieved.

The situation includes elements of both failure and defeat; although it is more defeat than failure, yet the reality is there, the challenge is there. It would have been enough to say at the very outset that for a Muslim, achievement lies in the pleasure of Allah, because he is responsible for his effort and answerable only to the extent of his capacity. This is true, but there is another dimension of the achievement which is so positive and so tangible but is either overlooked or under-valued. What has been possible to achieve despite untold odds and immense handicaps, and achieve unfailingly and progressively is the establishment of innumerable person-states. The very fact that, this morning, here in Britain, people coming out from secular background and education are discussing the question of renovation is but a small manifestation of this fact. We said in the very beginning that the scheme of Islam is based on the autonomy of the individual and if the individual opts to be a person-state unto himself, he achieves a great deal though not all. After all the corporate state is nothing else but a confederation of person-states. Where we stand today is to move towards achieving such a confederation. The answer, of course, lies in tomorrow and as a famous orientalist warned his readers, despite all its setbacks Islam has not yet said the last word. The last word is yet to be said.