Toward Social Change in Islam

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Abstract- Islam is a way of life that guides human beings to the right way, which satisfies their spiritual as well as material needs. Along with human beings is the fundamental factor in social change and development. Accordingly, this paper discusses about the social change in Islam. The purpose is to understand how Islam concerns about the social, political, and economic life as well as the morality and ethics of Muslim’s Ummah. Hence, this paper aims to reform humanity and change them in accordance to Quran and Sunnah, so that they succeed in both, this world and the Hereafter.

Index Term-- Islam, Religion, Social Change, Sociology.

I. INTRODUCTION
The crisis that Muslim societies are facing is multi-dimensional in nature, embracing political, social, economic, psychological, and educational domains1. These “crises” as well as the situations of the contemporary Muslim societies have projected a negative impression about Islam to non-Muslims. The non-Muslims, especially western thinkers, as a consequence, have generally presented prejudiced and biased views about Islam. They have concluded that Islam is against change and development; therefore, it is the main cause of Muslim backwardness. According to them, Islam is a barrier to change and development. This myth was created by some Western thinkers and Orientalists, who influenced some Muslim thinkers who did not understand the real dynamics of change as articulated in Islam. They considered Islam as a tradition bound system and suggested that this situation must be changed. Also as a result of this logic they recommended that Islam should be developed, on the pattern of Western societies, in order for it to become relevant to the modern conditions and needs2. If anything in the religion conflicts with the modernity, it should be “explained away, reinterpreted arbitrarily or discarded as obsolete”3. One of these thinkers is Max Weber who has claimed that, “While the rise of Protestant ethic propelled economic development in the West, the feudalistic Islamic religion provides little incentive for individual initiative, scientific inquiry and for intellectual boldness”4. He has also argued that, “Islam with its thoroughly traditionalistic ethic directed in the conduct of life into paths whose effect was plainly opposite to methodical control of life found among puritans”5.

Another biased view about Islam has been given by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, an orientalist:

“No great insight to recognize that the Middle East today is an area where the former way of life is falling apart without a satisfactory substitute having yet made its appearance. It is more difficult to draw positive conclusions as to the cause of this deterioration…Faced with the necessity of quickly and decisively evolving a new social, economic and political pattern, the educated classes in the Middle East have so far shown themselves almost totally inadequate to the task. Accustomed to believe that their way of life was inherently superior to that of any other religious or racial group, they have been unable to grasp the fact that this way of life has failed them. Refusing to acknowledge where they themselves have failed, they have fallen in to the pitfall of blaming others, in this case, the West”6.

On the basis of the above quotation, one is led to then believe that Islam is a static religion and is really the cause of failure and backwardness of Muslim Ummah. Our answer is an emphatic no.

Islam is a way of life that guides human beings to the right way, which satisfies their spiritual as well as material needs. It has commanded us not to deny the goods of the earth; rather, it has asked us to seek them as we seek the Hereafter.


5 Ibid., p. 27.

Islam has never ignored social change, and has always been concerned with it from the first day it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم). It has changed people’s lives from being non-believers to believers, and from being scattered in different places to one Ummah under one law that is the Islamic Shari’ah and into believers in one God Who is Absolute. Besides this, it has transformed their social, political, and economic life as well as their morality and ethics. It has been revealed to reform humanity⁷ to succeed in both, this world and the Hereafter, because human beings (al-nās) are the fundamental factor in social change and development. They are responsible for their decline or development by using their freedom and intellects⁸. Islam has commanded us to modify and alter the social structure of human society. Most of its revelations are actually directed towards implementing change and transformation of society, which were implemented by the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم)¹⁰. It has laid down general universal laws (Summat Allāh), which are fixed and can be applied in every society according to the needs of the changing times. These immutable laws clearly point in the direction of social change in Islam. All changes and developments that take place in any society, should take place on the basis of these fixed and immutable laws¹¹. Islamic Shari’ah rules are of two types. The first category is basic principles, which are not subject to change. They are not affected by the changes in time and place, such as the laws of inheritance. The others are subsidiary principles, which may be altered according to changing times in the society. These types of rule are related to suit or work in consonance with the lives of people. In situations like these the method of Ijtihād is used¹². Since this is the actual nature of Islam and its rules, then the obvious conclusion is that Muslims’ backwardness is because of other reasons and not the religion. This is a clear case of mistaken identity.

Many Muslim scholars and thinkers have tried to specify the causes behind the backwardness of the Muslim Ummah. They have divided these causes into two major sources: external and internal. The external cause is the western colonialism, which dominated Muslim societies for a very long period of time, changed their laws, educational systems, controlled their resources, and thwarted their revival¹³. The internal cause for some of them, like Malik Bennabá, is related to the historical decline of Muslim culture. “If the Muslim culture had been able to produce the type of society which could stand economically and technologically and muster the military which could repulse Western aggression, colonialism would have not been possible”¹⁴. For him, the external cause is the consequence of the cultural decline. The problem is that “individual lacks the intellectual skills and the practical training and experience to deal with the economic, social and political challenges confronting him, as well as the ability to translate the theoretical solutions to practical measures”¹⁵. For others, like ‘Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman and Isma’il al-Faruqi, the cause of the backwardness of the Muslim Ummah is the malaise of their thought and method¹⁶. Therefore, the process of changing Muslim societies must begin with the thinking processes of people. It should be based on Islamic thought and be guided by its teachings¹⁷. Thinkers like Sayyed Qutb, have asserted that the cause of Muslims decline is that their societies have stooped too low on morality and commitment to the Islamic worldview¹⁸.

In addition to the above factors, Muslim thinkers and scholars have failed to recognize other factors, which also cause the backwardness of Muslim Ummah. In my view, the significant

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¹⁷ The Qurʾān, 28: 77.
¹¹ ʿAli Shariʿatūtā, pp. 50-51 passim.
¹³ Sāfī, p.162 passim; and Isma’il R. al-Faruqi and ʿAbdul Ṭāmiʿ Abā Sulaymān, Islamization of knowledge: general principles and work plan.

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International Institute of Islamic Thought, Virginia, 1993, p. x.
Ibid., Sāfī, p.162.
factor is lack of practice of the Islamic principles of Tazkiyah, Ḥusn, Ḥijād, and Ijīḥād in all aspects of our life. These principles play significant role in bringing about changes in both material and spiritual aspects at both the individual and collective levels of Muslim societies. This is what the early Muslims, during the time of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and the following centuries, ardently practiced. Therefore, they were able to change and become the best of Ṣunnah as had ordained them. Thus, these principles and the role they played in changing individuals and societies will be the main focus of our discussion here.

II. SOCIAL CHANGE IN ISLAM

Generally change is a universal, unavoidable, irreversible and is a necessary phenomenon. Change is everywhere and happens all the time. It is unavoidable in the sense that it imposes itself upon us. It occurs whether we like it or not. Change is endemic; therefore all societies must change. Those that do not will disappear.

Indeed, the general view that is found in the Eastern and the Western literature affirms the universality, irreversibility, necessity and unavoidability of change. In contrast, there is an opposite view that denies change and considers it an abnormal and undesirable phenomenon. Christianity, for example, presents change as sin and violence. On the contrary, Islam views change, as an inseparable part of our life and it should be allowed to take its natural course at both the individual and societal level.

However, the importance of change and its powerful effect on the lives of people has been explained in different ways as cyclical and evolutionary processes. These theories have indicated the direction of change. Change also has been presented as an outcome of conflict between two or more groups. Its other dimensions, identity, levels, rate, magnitude, direction, consequences, effects, and sources- have preoccupied the attention of thinkers and sociologists in order to understand its nature. But they differ in their explanations of change and its nature. These differences can be traced back generally to the ideological basis of each thinker.

The theories offered by Western sociologists are generally materialistic in nature. The reason is that these theories were formulated to oppose religion in general as well as Christianity in particular, which was against change. Muslims’ theories, on the other hand, explain change not only materially, but also spiritually and morally, because these theories are based on Islam. They also indicate the direction a society must take if it wants to change and not disappear. Islam has a unique vision about social change, which is not found in other ideologies and religions. It agrees with the necessity, unavoidability, irreversibility and universality of change. Therefore, it advocates the necessity of changing human societies particularly Muslim in accordance with Shariʿah requirements. However, the basic point that affirms the uniqueness of Islamic mission and vision of social change can be traced back to its fundamental and eternal foundation that is Tawhid. Tawhid implies that there is no God, but Allāh Who knows about everything that happens in the universe and the only one who knows what is useful and what is harmful for all human beings and their societies. This is the core idea of Islam and the basis of all aspects of human behavior and life as a whole. Hence, change also must be aligned according to Tawhid. Therefore, the main objective of change in Islam is to assert and proclaim the unity of Allāh in all spheres and aspects of human life. Another objective is to improve and change the inner nature of human beings spiritually and morally in order to succeed in this and the other eternal world where we have to live forever. The bases and objectives of change in Islam are different from that of Western worldview. The basis of change according to the West is materialistic; therefore, its objective is to succeed only in this world and worship their GNP and life-style.

Another point that shows the uniqueness of Islamic vision is the way how it presents the nature of change. In order for us to understand the nature of change, we must understand its identity, levels, directions, rate, and sources.

Islam uses many special concepts that are not found in other theories, particularly Western, to refer to change. These concepts are generated from the basic Islamic sources, the Qur’ān and Sunnah, and they include tagghahiyur, tabaddul, tahawwul, khoraj, tajdid, and Islāh. It agrees and does not oppose Western concepts such as evolution, progress, and development. But it offers different definitions and interpretations of these concepts. In addition, it defines social change as it refers to spiritual, moral and material changes, which occur in a society and its elements on the basis of Tawhid.

Moreover, it differs with the Westerners theory on the question of what is changing in order to identify change. Hence, Islam asserts that not everything can be subjected to change. There is something, which cannot be changed such as Ḥudud Laws. In contrast, for the Westerners, everything is subject to change, even the concept of God and religion.

However, the things that can be changed, in Islam, go in one of three directions: deviation from the Absolute, parallel to the Absolute or return toward the Absolute. These three directions can also be reduced to two for convenience: changes toward the best and the worst. Westerners have presented the same directions, toward the best in a unilinear or multilinear, cumulative manner, or toward the best and the worst in a cyclical manner. But what makes Islam unique in its approach and direction is related to how far change is related to the reality of the existence of Allāh and His unity.

consistent and agreeable to the Divine law and how far it deviates from it. All else is only a manifestation of this law.

As change goes in different directions in Islam, it must take place at all levels: individual, group, community, societal and universal, but mostly at the level of the individuals. The reason is that individuals are the active agents of change. Any change in them will cause subsequent changes at the other levels. In the case of individuals, Islam emphasizes to change their inner beings; their awareness and consciousness, their attitudes, beliefs, motivations and morality and spirituality. As a result of this inner change, society will also change from one stage of perfection to another, both materially and non materially. It is quite clear from the following *ayah* of the Qur’ān:

> إن الله لا يُعَدِّلُ مَا قَدَّمَ عَلَى تَحْكُرٍ مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ. (سورة الرعد:11)

“Verily never Will Allāh change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls)“⁹²⁰.

These changes, either at the level of individual or society must be planned and be gradual because it does not approve sudden and destabilizing changes. Islam requires planning for these changes in order for it to be well organized and achieve more effective results. This plan must take place in a gradual form. This means that change must occur in gradual stages leading to perfection. A singular *Qur’anic* contribution is that everything in this world changes in stages. The individuals, for example, would not be able to change their societies unless they change what is within themselves; soul and mind. What is within human beings can be changed by taking certain steps:

1) Acquire proper and appropriate knowledge, 2) proper thinking, 3) change or reform beliefs, 4) worship regularly, 5) adjust deeds constantly in consonance with Islam, and 6) establish good relations with others. All these steps will change the personality of Muslims. Changing other people also goes through certain stages. These stages can be taken from the *Qur’ān* and the biography of the Prophet ( صلى الله عليه وسلم) who has used them to change people:

> هو الذي نهى في الأئمة فرعوناً فشلهم بقرن عليهم نبياً وغابهم وعفا عليهم الكتاب والخاتمة. (سورة الإبلة:2)

“It is He Who has sent among the unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in scripture and wisdom”⁹²¹.

These stages involve the changing of beliefs and ideas of people. The first stage is through recitation of the verses of Allāh. The next is purification of heart, mind and soul. Purification also means reformation, development, or progress and modification of the behavior. This purification passes through three stages:

1) Islam, 2) *Imān*, and 3) *Ihsān*. When the Muslims are able to reach last stage one can say that they have attained a perfect personality. After purification, the Holy Book and *Hikmah* are taught to people. This stage involves both the intellectual and the functional⁹²². This form of change, in Islam, is called *Islāh*. The graduality of change denotes that change is a continuous process. We should not stop changing even if we attain the perfect stage of progression and seldom become complacent. Keeping change in the best direction after perfection is to maintain this perfection. But if we stop at that stage and become satisfied with this change, we start to change toward the worst. That is why Islam wants to continue changing for the better. The concept of *Tawbah* approves this point. It is a continuous process of change. It is a kind of renewal (*tajdeed*). The companions of the Prophet, for example, continued changing, though some of them, like ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭāb (R), were given the glad tidings that they will enter Paradise.

The reason why Islam prefers gradual change is that it is more lasting, more influential and more suitable and in consonance with human nature. Therefore, Islam is generally in favor of only the positive permanent change, but not the temporal or fleeting change that lasts for certain period of time or for certain conditions. Allāh has criticized those who are opportunistic and only change for a specific situation and for certain period of time. When this situation has changed, they return to their bad deeds and behaviors⁹²³. He has considered the temporal and opportunistic change as one of the characteristics of hypocrites⁹²⁴. Though Islam did not recognize only the temporal change, it does not ignore the importance of time in the process of change. The performance of prayers, fasting and payment of alms, are an affair governed by time. Moreover, Allāh has used time to swear at many places in the *Qur’ān*⁹²⁵. It, from the birth until the death of human beings, is created for working and fulfilling the purpose of our existence, but not to waste it in bad actions and against the divine law. In this case, it becomes *hijjah* against us. The Prophet (peace be upon him) declared that time is one of the things that every human being will be asked on the Day of Judgment as to how they spend it. When people recognize the importance of time and how it will stand against them in the Day of Judgment,

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²³ The Qur’ān, 17: 67.

²⁴ Ibid., 2:8-16.

²⁵ Ibid., 103: 1; 89: 1-2; and many others.

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¹⁹ The Qur’ān, 13: 11.

²¹ The Qur’ān, 62: 2.
they will spend it in a proper manner. They would not waste
their time, except for the proper progression of themselves and
their society\textsuperscript{26}. This is one of the reasons for Muslims
backwardness. We do not recognize the importance of time as
we waste it on nonsensical thing, which does not lead to our
progress, but takes us backwards. We would not be able to
become a developed nation unless we learn to use time in a
planned manner.

Moreover, we must generate the changes we bring about from
certain sources. These sources, in Islam, are multifarious. The
foremost and the fundamental source is the Holy Qur’an. It is
the guidance for people in all aspects of their life for all
times to come\textsuperscript{27}. The second source is the Prophet Mu’ammad
(peace be upon him) and his teachings\textsuperscript{28}. Third one is the
universe and whatever elements it consists of, like heaven,
earth, stars, moon, sun, plants, animals, and so on, which are
the resources provided for the usufructs of human beings and
the means that help them to bring about changes\textsuperscript{29}. These three
sources lead to material, moral and spiritual changes. These
changes go in the direction of the Divine that Islam proposes.
Other sources of change include technology, economic, polity,
and competition. According to Islam, these sources lead to the
development of people’s life and their societies and they can be
the sources of their destruction as well if misused.

Technology, for example, may lead positively to material
conveniences and advantages, but it may, at the same time,
fail to achieve a proper balance between the material and non-
material changes. Therefore, it has the potential to affect the
spiritual and moral aspects of people’s life negatively. The
contemporary societies are the best examples of this point.
Whereas most of these societies are materially developed, they
are morally and spiritually loose and lukewarm about it. So,
Islam is not against these sources; instead, it acknowledges
them as long as they are not contradicting basic Islamic
principles and are not causing disequilibrium between the material and spiritual aspects of life. The uniqueness of the
Islamic vision about the sources of change rests on what kind
of changes they bring; positive or negative, and how far they
can maintain equilibrium between the different aspects of life.
Moreover, it considers them as only a means of change, but
not as goals for change.

Another point, which confirms the uniqueness of the Islamic
vision of social change is that Islam, unlike the Western
approach, lays down laws for social change. These laws are
fixed and universal. They are immutable in the sense that they
cannot be changed and are created by God. The universality of
these laws implies that they occur all the time and in any

\textsuperscript{26} Amr Khaled, \textit{Qiymat al-Waqt}, retrieved in April 1, 2003,
one of the speeches of Āata Yughairu ma bi Anfusiim series, web site: \url{http://www.amrkhaled.net}.

\textsuperscript{27} The Qur’an, 20: 2-3; 27: 92; 54: 17; 59: 21; and 72: 1-2.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 33: 45-46; 18: 2-4; and 2: 119 and 101.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 3: 190-191; 86: 5-7; 88: 17-21; 35: 13; and 78: 6-16.

society as long as the conditions for their existence are there.
These laws are manifest in certain concepts, like justice and
injustice, luxury and ostentatious life, and internal and
external changes. From these concepts of laws of change, we
can deduce certain hypotheses

With justice a society will rise and without it a society will
fall. There are historical events, which prove this fact. The
best example is the Islamic society itself. There was a time
when this society had a meteoric rise mainly because it
pursued the cause of justice. However, it presupposes the
existence of certain conditions, which are proposed by Islam
to change humanity and societies. These conditions are
brought out through concepts like knowledge, \textit{Tazkiyah},
\textit{Tafakkur}, \textit{Īlah}, \textit{Jihād}, \textit{Taskheer} and \textit{Ijtihād}. All these
concepts are significantly related to administrate justice and
eradicate injustice. When the actualization of these concepts
disappear from the Islamic society, injustice dominates, which
causes its destruction and leads to its decline.

The misuse of wealth and materialistic values lead to injustice
and this causes destruction of a society. So there is a
reciprocal relationship between wealth and injustice. It is
mentioned in the \textit{Qur’an} that people who are wallowing in
luxury generally tend to commit injustice\textsuperscript{30}. It is mentioned
also that with injustice people tend to hoard and collect wealth
and try to live a luxurious life. Usury, for example, related
with greed and injustice\textsuperscript{31}. It increases the affluence of
the usurers because they take other people’s money away without
any reason to live a luxurious life. People who have economic
or political powers are also involved into this offensive habit.
Generally, it is found in most of the contemporary modern
societies without exception. Therefore, their economic
systems are facing many unsolved crises and problems.

The above mentioned ideas are indicative of the Islamic vision
of social change. Now we want to deal with how we can bring
about change according to Islam. In other words, what Islam
proposes to bring about change? Before we discuss about this,
we want to know “what should be changed in a society?”
There are long discussions among many Western sociologists
about what should be changed in a society? C. Wright Mills,
for instance, has argued that change occurs in group activities
and relationships of a society, while others, like Judson R.
Landis, limited change only in the social relationships. There
are others, like Morris Ginsberg, who claimed that change
occurs in the structure of a society, while Ronald Edari, have
added that change occurs in the social structure as well as
relationships. Harry M. Johnson, see change in the structure
and function of a society as well as various contributive\textsuperscript{32}.

\textsuperscript{30} The Qur’an, 17: 16.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 2: 275-279; and 4: 160-161.

Change, in Islam, takes place in the elements of a society, which include individuals, activities and relationships, Shari’ah laws, and universe.

Diagram 1

Elements of Islamic society

Individual

activities and

Shari’ah law

universe

Relationships

To change these elements, Islam proposes certain concepts, which, by and large, are processes of change. These concepts constitute Tazkiyah, Taťāfikr, Islāh, Jihād, Taskhēr and Ijtihād. Islam presents these concepts in an understandable and clear way. These concepts are meaningfully correlated so much so that it becomes impossible to separate them. They are helped by the process of acquiring knowledge. We cannot bring about any change in these elements without knowledge. The idea depicting these various processes and its relationship with society is given in the form of a diagram in the following:

Diagram 2

Knowledge is very important in the process of change in the sense that it would not occur in any society without it. It is related with all the other changes with the other elements of a society. This concept is considered as the key of change in Islam. When Islam, for the first time, was revealed to the Prophet Mu‘āammad (peace be upon him), the first call was for acquiring knowledge. This knowledge should be based on truth and be useful. It must be connected with ethics and morality, values and goals. The main reason we acquire knowledge is to bring us closer to God, to spread freedom and dignity, truth and justice. The sources of knowledge that we acquire are Divine revelation, in particular the Qur’ān, and the use of intellect and reason. Muslims also have to acquire professional knowledge to obtain a livelihood as well as to live in the contemporary world in order “to analyze it by using principles and concepts from the Islamic worldview and to offer alternatives for the future direction of human beings.” This knowledge constitutes the basis of all concepts and the various processes of change. Let us now see how each element of a society will be changed.

1. Changing the Individuals

The first element to be changed is individuals. We previously mentioned that, in Islam, no change would take place in any society without changing what is within the heart, soul and mind of its individuals. Individuals are essential for the existence of a society and for the changes of all aspects of life. Therefore, Islam gives more emphasis to change the individual of a society internally and externally both materially and immaterially. Islam proposes such concepts and processes to change the internal and the external natures of human beings. The inner nature of human beings constitutes soul and mind, while the external nature includes physical appearance, activities and relationships with one another.

Changing what is within the individual heart and soul in Islam is the most difficult task. That is why it needs seriousness, will, intention, and trust in, time, exertion, hope, endurance and patience. Allāh says:

But he hath made no haste on the path that is steep. And what will explain to thee the path that is steep?36

In its early history, Islam, at the time of the Prophet, spent the first thirteen years in changing heart and mind of people before it enforced its Shari’ah laws that regulate human beings actions and organizes their relations with each other and with other creations. Therefore, Islam proposes certain concepts that change the inner nature of human beings.

The first concept is Tazkiyah. Tazkiyah is the process that is used to change and purify the inner part of human nature, particularly the soul. By following this concept, a person progresses gradually from one moral and spiritual height to

36 The Qur’ān, 90: 11-12.
another— from being a Muslim, to a Mo‘amin and ultimately to a Muhsin, which is the highest stage. To purify oneself, Muslims, as the viceroy of (Khulafa) should completely submit themselves to Allah. What is expected of them is “to obey Him, to realize His commandments and actualize His pattern”. By doing this, human beings will achieve felicity (Fałāḥī) in another stage. Tazkiyah is known as educational Jihād. It is considered the greatest Jihād as well as the spiritual Jihād. Therefore, it is defined as “the effort directed upon oneself for the attainment of moral and religious perfections”. Hence, a Muslim must “strive to preserve and develop his innate goodness”. To help Muslims to strengthen their innate goodness and keep them on the straight path, “Islam provides such a pattern of behavior and the institutions of control and dynamism, such as prayer (Salāt), fasting (Sawm) and others”. It also “provides other practices that strengthen human beings’ awareness of God and mold their thoughts and actions into the natural mould of worship (Ibādah), such as Dhikr, Du’aa and others”. This perfection cannot be attained without knowledge. That is why the first and foremost crucial obligation, of Muslims as individuals both male and female, is to acquire knowledge.

Purifying of the soul is not enough to change the inner side of human nature, therefore, changing the mind or ‘aql is also required. This can be achieved through the process of Tafakkur, which is another concept. Tafakkur means deep thinking. It is an intellectual effort. It can be exercised to strengthen human belief in God or to attain truth or attain the world (duniya). This thinking cannot take place if there are no elements of the universe that are subservient to human beings. It also can be exercised when individuals struggle to derive rules from the main sources, the Qur’an and Sunnah. In other words, it can be used for the process of Ijtihād. It is also one of the ways through which we can gain true, absolute and perfect knowledge.

2. Changing the Activities and Relationships of human beings

An individual also can evolve the inner richness of his being “through establishing as many intensive and fruitful contacts with the surrounding reality and through give-and-take between them and their environment”. Beside this, human beings must play an active role to change and improve their environment and the people of their environment. By learning the God-given norms and patterns (Sunnat), and manipulating them, they plan and “lay the foundations of a better future for both the individual and society”.

Inner richness needs healthy body, therefore, Islam requires Muslims to keep strong and healthy body by proper eating and drinking habits, by exercises and sports, work and activity, by proper sleep and rest and by cleanliness and personal hygiene. Besides, Islam prohibits Muslims from neglecting and harming their own body by any types of prohibited food and drink, and by involving in any adventurous activities that may risk their lives.

When the Muslims, as individuals, purify their innate and outer nature and perfect themselves both physically and spiritually, they turn to change and improve the social structure of their societies. They start changing the moral behavior of their families, and close associates. Then, they turn to their group, society, and community. All these improvements are accomplished by performing Islāh. The term Islāh, in modern Arabic, is used for “reform”. It is “an intellectual, and frequently practical, response to the injunction of commanding what is good and prohibiting what is evil”. It means correction or amelioration. It is restoring the health of a community to the path of Islam. The one who performs Islāh is called Muslih. The duty of a Muslih, or Musliha (plural), is to perform pious act, to preach peace, harmony and strive to make humans better. In other words, they should teach their people how to read, about their religions, restrain them from evil, and invite them to the path of Islam. Not only this, they have to change other institutions of their societies, such as family, education, economy, and politics, on the basis of Islamic Shari’ah. During the performance of their duty, Musliha need Ijtihād in order to solve the emergent situations of their people. The application of this concept results in the progression of their society and in reaching the best possible perfect stage. The basis for this is provided in the Qur’anic verse

37 Ahmad Fareed, Al-Tazkiyah bain Abl al-Sunnah wa al-Aqfiyah, Maktabat Riyāl al-Jannah, Cairo, p. 6.
38 Isma’il Raji Al-Faruqi, Al-Tawhid: its implications for thought and life, p. 14 passim.
41 AbdulWahid Hamid, pp. 46-50 passim.
42 Ibid., pp. 50-54.
43 K. G. Saiyidain, pp. 28-29 passim.
45 AbdulWahid Hamid, p. 42 passim.
47 B. Lewis and others, p. 141 passim.
48 Dawud Rosser-Owen, p. 20 passim.
49 AbdulWahid Hamid, p. 135 passim.
“Ye are the best of nations, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allāh.”

Once the Muslims improve their lives, both materially and spiritually, they have to struggle against all forms of evil, corruption, injustice, tyranny and oppression which are committed against Muslims or non-Muslims in the world. In other words, it is their duty to perform Jihad to promote justice and spread Islam all over the world. This cannot be done without strength and power. So, Islam commands Muslim Ummah to train and equip themselves and be ready to defend against any aggression. Jihad needs strong Muslims, both physically and spiritually, and powerful states, in all aspects of life, such as political, military, economic, and educational, to be achieved in a proper way. It also needs Ijtihād to solve any problems that may occur.

3. Changing the Universe

Taskheer, is used to change the society materially and to change our thinking and souls spiritually and morally. All elements that exist in this universe, like sun, moon, metals, mountain, and seas, etc., are subservient to all humanity. They are made and created for the “usufruct” of people. By using ‘Aql for thinking and inventing new sciences to mold these elements and resources, people will be able to change and progress their societies materially. By using iron, for example, people invented new types of transportation, restructured high buildings, invented machines, and weapons. So, the ability of molding and exploiting the resources of the universe helps human beings to change and develop their societies. To mould these means and elements, knowledge is needed. This knowledge helps us to know what is useful and what is harmful. This gives a chance to do Ijtihād to guide Muslims in the ways of using these resources for the changing of their societies according to the Islamic Shari‘ah. Since, these are the gifts of Allah, we have to deal with them morally without misusing and wasting them.

4. Shai‘ah Laws

The last process is Ijtihād. Ijtihād is an exceedingly important concept because it “plays the role of an evolutionary and dynamic force, which leads to solutions for the contingent issues of life and fulfils the needs of changing times and requirements of new phenomena of human civilization.” It also plays an important role in the Muslims’ daily life, in the formation of the spiritual, intellectual and mental balance of their personality as a vicegerent of Allāh on earth. It also, as an intellectual effort, requires from the Muslim to think deeply and exert their utmost to study the Holy Qur‘ān and the traditions of the Prophet as well as the issues that need rulings (Hukum). It is like “a methodology for thought, that is applied to all fields of knowledge and which allows the Muslim’s mind to participate in an intellectual jihād. This jihād aims to generate ideas and build a new Muslim identity, mentality and personality.” Dawud Rosser-Owen has called it the “progressive dimension.” From the preceding, we can conclude that Ijtihād is needed in all aspects of our lives, while the process of change is taking place, because Ijtihād provides an answer to the emergent and contingent issues of life. Exercising Ijtihād solves almost any problem that Muslims are faced with, while they are purifying their soul, practicing Islāh or performing Jihad. Though it constitutes the basis of other principles, it is needed by the individuals, society and the state to solve their problems on the basis of Islamic Shari‘ah. Without their existence, Ijtihād will not be as effective. It requires the individuals who struggle to practice it in their daily lives and provide the continuing means for its perpetuation. It also needs the society and state that produces the mature and qualified people who are mentally and intellectually prepared and give them the freedom to hold the duty of exercising it. So to apply Ijtihād to the changing situations of our contemporary life, we need healthy individuals, healthy society and healthy state in every sense of the word.

From the above discussion, we can see how these principles are interrelated and how they are interconnected with each other. We can also see how they work together to change the contemporary situations of Muslim Ummah in these times. The aim of these concepts is to depict change in Islam and to achieve balanced change in the various elements of the Islamic society as a whole. It does not have to go overboard and till the balance in either direction.

It is our main assumption in this chapter that the application of these concepts will lead toward the betterment of a society, while neglecting, in contrast, will lead to the worse. The unavoidable conclusion is that a neglect of these concepts in contemporary Muslim societies is the main cause of their

55 Dawud Rosser-Owen, p. 20 passim.

50 The Qur‘ān, 5: 78-79.
backwardness and crises they are facing. Tazkiyah has ceased to be practiced as it was in the early period, however, it did not entirely disappear. Instead, many Muslims generally practice it, but their acts of purification do not lead to the perfect stage as in the case of the companions and the successors after them. It seems that there are some problems with it. For instance, through purification process the early Muslims were changed into brave human beings and did not fear anybody and anything except Allāh. They rose up against injustice and many challenges. Now adays, the situation has drastically changed. We may find good and pious people, but most of them are not brave. They are afraid for their life, their status and livelihood. Those who are brave and rise against injustice are called “terrorists” even by their governments. Therefore, the jihad they performed is now characterized as “terrorism”. Here, we can see how the meaning of jihad has been changed and is considered related to violence as is perceived as such. For some people, purification now means just performing empty religious rites all the time, growing long beard, short dress, and not being concerned about this world and not interested in the use of its resources. Therefore, they do not work, and they spend most of the time sitting in the mosque; and even if they work, they only collect charities from people, especially during the month of Ramadān. Since this group is against the worldly affairs, they do not pay attention to the worldly sciences. Therefore, they are only concerned with traditional knowledge and avoid other types, which, according to them, are contradicting Islamic principles. Therefore, they are treated as useless. This group has misunderstood the Islamic teaching, which wants human beings to work for both this and the next world. They also forgot that Islam is the religion of work and struggle, but not worship only and they forgot that Islam is not against any type of knowledge as long as they are not contradicting its principles. Instead, Islam commands Muslims to get knowledge both the worldly as well as the religious knowledge. Most of the Qur’anic verses refer to many other sciences, like economics, politics, archeology, biology, physics, and astronomy. Other Muslims get knowledge to get a degree or to get a good job, but not for the sake of knowledge that Islam wants. Therefore, their performance for bringing out the changes in their society is not effective.

In addition, Muslims also ignore the importance of Tafakkur and usufruct of the elements of the universe for the development of their selves and their societies, both materially and spiritually. The material resources that are for usufruct for their development and progression are wasted and are sold to the Western societies in exchange for a small amount of money that goes to the pockets of the corrupt political leaders. The duty of Islāh, on the other hand, generally is now being practiced to reform the masses, but not the leaders. Besides, it has become limited to certain peripheral and incidental issues like calling Muslims to salāt rather than critical social problems that need to be addressed.

Same thing has happened with Ijtihād, which has been closed for many centuries. As a result, thinking process has been ossified. Though there have been many changes in this period, Ijtihād is not exercised. Muslim scholars are only issuing empty fatawahs, and most of them are only concerned with peripheral women’s issues or related to salāt or sawm rather than other serious problems of the society. The easier judgments are resorted to face certain issues. In other words, some scholars like the short cut in giving judgments about serious issues, like, the hukum or fatwa of Internet. The scholars in Saudi Arabia gave a fatwa that it is prohibited, because it shows unethical things. They gave this judgment without serious study. Later on when they realized its importance in spreading of Islam, they gave another judgment. Here we are not concerned with the changing of fatwa, but the lack of serious study of the issues before giving any judgment.

In conclusion, it seems that contemporary Muslim societies are backward because of the missing element of the application of Islamic concepts and precepts from their daily lives. Therefore, if Muslims want to rise again and progress in all spheres of their lives, they must come back to the Holy Qur’ān and the traditions of the Prophet. They must practice the most emphasized concepts and practices and finally, they must take the Prophet, his companions, successors, and their societies as a role model for their development and changes. Moreover, all these concepts must be practiced and actualized in organized groups. In Islam, an individual alone cannot bring about changes in a society, though persons can change their nature. Person must work with others to bring about changes in the society, because working within a group is more effective, and Allāh helps those who work together56. In addition, when members of a group work together, they come together, know, support and help each other. It helps them to enjoy safe life and attain strong position. Working with others also eliminates selfishness from the hearts of the members. Therefore, Islam encourages Muslims to form groups in all aspects of their lives, such as studying the Qur’ān, in Ijtihād, Islāh, and Jihad. Tazkiyah and Tafakkur, for example, have been mentioned in the Qur’ān in plural forms57. Though these are the processes for changing the inner nature of human beings, their effects on society would not be recognized unless groups of people apply changes in their inner natures as well. Similar to this is the concept of Ijtihād. This concept not only implies the intellectual exertion of an individual to modify the flexible Islamic laws to the changing situations of a society, but it is also a movement to bring about changes in all aspects of life. When we say a movement, it means that it involves a collectivity of people who exercise it in different fields. The decision arrived in this manner in a group can be considered as consensus that all Muslims should adhere to. It is Allāh’s command for Muslim Ummah to work together when they

56 The Qur’ān, 48: 10.
57 Ibid., 2: 119; 31: 11; and 8: 53.
exercise *Ijtihād* 58. This strengthens and leads them to the truth and correct position on everything. Therefore, one can say that though a single person alone can do a lot, but it is for purposes of producing good results that Muslims are advised to work in a group.

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allāh (stretches out for you) and be not divided among yourselves 59.

This verse commands Muslims to help each other and work together in all aspects of their lives. Moreover, the nature of most, if not all, of the Islamic teachings have been delivered in a plural form. They address all people particularly Muslims in a plural form. In the Qur’ān, terms like “Ā‘āmanā”, “al-nās”, “Mūslīmūn”, “Mūslīmāt”, and other terms used for second person, are addressed to people as a group.

Such exhortations and commandments motivate Muslims to form organized groups, which consist of responsible leaders, united members, goals, working plans, clear programs and clear concepts those relate members with the leader on the basis of loyalty. The smallest group, in Islam is that of *jamā‘a* prayer. A social movement is a collectivity of people who work as a team to reform and revive society and bring about changes in its constitutive elements. Islam is the most important and influential movement that ever took place on the earth, since the time of Adam and it will remain so until the end of this world. On the basis of this movement, many reforms and revivalist movements took shapes in the Muslim world, such as *Ikhwān al-Mūslīmūn*, *Jamā‘at Islāmī* and *al-Tablīgh* movement. Historically, these movements started in the eighteenth century as a result of the many weakness of Muslim *Ummah* and the expansion of Western colonialism, which has negatively affected Muslim societies politically, economically and religiously. In the beginning, some of these movements, like Sufism, were concerned about the inner richness of human beings and tended to bring them back to Islam and its teachings. Then, other movements, such as *Pathan* movement in Northwest Frontier Provinces, turned their focuses to the political reformation of Muslim societies and work as a resistance to the Western colonialism and, later, to Muslim Modernism. Some of the Modernistic movements, like Sir Sayyid A‘āmad Khan’s movement, aimed to adopt Western educational systems for the Muslims. These advocated that the medieval Islamic civilization should be repudiated and Islam itself should be reconstructed. This will enable Muslim societies to develop on the pattern of Western societies. Some other movements like that of Jamā’il al-dān al-Afghānā and Mu‘āammād ʿAbduh, attempted to combine between the Muslim Modernism and Islamic reformism. They aimed to adopt the Western systems and mold them to the Islamic principles. Movements, like *Salafiyyah*, are concerned with the reformation of religious educational system only and have tried to adjust to the modern economics and technology. As the time has passed, some movements, like Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, pitted themselves against the secularization of Muslim world. They engaged in many modern social, political, and economic activities.60 Some of these movements have continued until today. There are many new movements in contemporary times. These can be characterized as responses to the current Muslims crises; political, economic, social or educational. The basic character of most of these movements is that they all agree that Muslims are undergoing through crises in their societies, but they differ in their analyses and methodologies in terms of the causes and solutions. The Islamization of Knowledge movement, for example, sees that these crises are in the Muslim thought, which is a consequence of educational crisis. This crisis is partly caused by the conflict that exists in the educational systems of Muslim societies—traditional and western. So to solve this and other crises as well, we should combine these two systems. Some other movements, like *Islāh* movement, see that crises among Muslims are caused by the political system of Muslim societies, therefore, to change these societies Muslims should work for justice and replace injustice of their leaders, which ought to be replaced by able and qualified leaders. Similarly, *Al-Qā‘adah* movement is a result of the corruption in the local polity as well as the international politics. This movement calls Muslims to unite and stand against the injustices of their local political systems and against other forms of unjust political systems that are aimed against Islam and Muslims particularly the American arrogance and Israeli aggression against the brave Palestines.62 These are the most important current movements in the Muslim world. All these are organized and engaged in many activities in order to bring about changes all over the world particularly in Muslim societies.

III. CONCLUSION

Islam is a way of life that guides human beings to the right way, which satisfies their spiritual as well as material needs. Islam has positively and definitely been concerned about social change since its inception. It has changed people in the past from being unbelievers to believers, from being scattered in different places to one *Ummah* under one Law that is the Islamic *Sharā‘ah* and believing in one God who is Absolute. Besides, it has changed their social, political, and economic life as well as their morality and ethics. It aims to reform


61 See their website (http://www.Islah.org).

humanity to succeed in both, this world and the Hereafter, because human beings are the fundamental factor in social change and development. They are literally responsible for their decline or development by exercising their freedom and intellect. Islam also wants to modify and alter the social structure of human societies. Most of its revelations are actually the methods of change and transformation as applied to society by the Prophet (صلی اللہ علیه وسلم). It aims to change humanity and society spiritually, morally and materially in order to succeed in this and the other world. It has laid down general universal laws, or Sunnat Allah as it has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān, which are fixed and can be applied to every society at different periods of times. These immutable laws are the real factors of social change in Islam. All changes and developments that take place in any society, should take into account the basis of these fixed and immutable laws by Allah (SWT). Besides, it proposes certain concepts that signify the processes of change - knowledge, Tazkiyah, Tafakkur, Islāā, Jihād, Taskheer and Ijtihād. From the actualization of these concepts and the general vision of social change in Islam, we deduce certain strategies that are important in the process of change. By following these strategies, we will be able to bring about change that Islam wants:

We must specify our aims and objectives underlying change.

We must predict the difficulty of change, but not the impossibility. Therefore we must have will and exert our effort to bring about change, and must be patient and serious. Our intention and effort for change must be for the sake of God’s pleasure. Therefore, we must put trust in Him, use all the means, and follow all Islamic procedures that are possible to bring about change.

We must work with others in the process of change. In other words, we must work with team, but not individually in order to achieve good results.

We must have plan for changes and follow steps and stages of change. This must start with changing our natures - inner and outer, our families, friends, and people in general.

We must continue changing even if we achieve our aims and objectives in order to maintain the perfect balance and to not change for the worst.

63 Mehdi Abedi and Gary Legenhausen (ed), p 56 passim.
64 Ali Shari’ati, pp. 47-50 passim.
66 Ali Shari’ati, pp. 50-51 passim.