

## The Influence of Al-Mawdudi and The *Jama'at Al Islami* Movement On Sayyid Qutb Writings

<sup>1</sup>Asyraf Hj. A.B. Rahman and <sup>2</sup>Nooraihan Ali

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Islam and Contemporary Studies, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Terengganu, Malaysia

---

**Abstract:** One of the most well known scholars in Muslim society of the twentieth century was Sayyid Qutb. Throughout the formative phases of Qutb's life, many figures were responsible for shaping his cultural and intellectual orientation. This paper will discuss and examine al-Mawdudi's influence on the life of Sayyid Qutb. The study used content analysis approach by looking into al-Mawdudi's writings and its influence on Sayyid Qutb's thought manifested through his later writings. Results show that al-Mawdudi was one of the most important figures who responsible for shaping the life of Sayyid Qutb which resulted in profound changes in his intellectual and political outlook as manifested in his writings.

**Key words:** Muslim society • Islamic ideologue • Islamic Movement • Muslim Revivalist • Religious commitment

---

### INTRODUCTION

Sayyid Qutb was well known intellectual figure in Muslim society. There are numerous well-known figures of the twentieth century who influenced the development of Sayyid Qutb's thought during his formative phases. This paper examines the intellectual environment outside Egypt which influenced Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) so much during his formative years and which resulted in profound changes in his intellectual and political outlook which has manifested in his writings. The study will focus on Abu al 'Ala al-Mawdudi (1903-1979), one of the intellectual figures, who regarded as having a strong influence on Qutb's thought on socio-political issues and Islam whom Qutb clearly mentioned in many of his later writings in particular al-Mawdudi's term usage like *jahiliyyah*, *hakimiyyah*, *dawlah* and *jihad*.

In the context of the intellectual discourse of the twentieth century Islamic thought, Mawdudi was regarded as among the pioneers of the Islamic revivalists to develop a wide-ranging ideology through the *Jama'at al-Islami*, the party that he founded in Lahore in 1941. As a result of his commitment and struggle, the party branches and members now exist in Pakistan, India, Kashmir and Sri Lanka [1]. Al-Mawdudi's works and idea attracted Qutb so much among which including the idea

of establishing a true Islamic society. Both have some similarities in the sense that the surrounding environment they lived socially, economically and politically considered no longer Islamic and the establishment of a new Islamic environment governed by syari'ah law in all walks of life is a must. Both also believed that civilisation was torn between the forces of Islam and jahiliyah, or ignorance and that Islamic law (syari'ah) was central to a just society.

Data for this article is based on a research conducted using content analysis approach. The content analysis approach is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding. In this study, al-Mawdudi's thought and his influence upon Sayyid Qutb's socio-political writings are analyzed based on the available literatures. This includes al-Mawdudi's understanding of Islam as a way of life, his activities within the *Jama'at al-Islami* and his views on political and religious issues to which the application of Islamic socio-political doctrine should be fully understood and could not be disregarded. Qutb's main thought manifested in his later writings on above issues resulted from al-Mawdudi's thought and influences are elaborated and discussed in relevant themes according to objective of this study.

Prior to al-Mawdudi's influence, Qutb's development of thought can be traced through three important stages. The first stage began with his literary works, in which he became a well-known literary critic between 1926 and 1948. Some of the important works produced by Qutb during this stage were *Tifl min al-Qaryah* and *al-Madinah al-Mashurah* [2]. Later, from 1948 to the early 1950s, he moved from literature to social criticism of the basic contradictions in Egyptian society, which he aspired to resolve. He found that Islam was the only solution to his country's socio-political problems. He struggled together with the Ikhwan, an Islamic organization founded by Hassan al Banna (in 1928) against the existing order until his imprisonment in 1954. The last stage began in prison and ended with his execution in 1966 [2, 3]. Qutb finally emerged as an Islamic ideologue whose main concern was to see human society governed under an Islamic society or government in all walks of life [2]. To this end he produced a more radical and open criticism of those in authority. In his view, the lives of Muslims were gradually astray from Islamic teachings and there were a need for revivalism. Muslims have to return back to their original roots [4]; accepting all Islamic teachings and governing the whole life in accordance with the Qur'an and teachings (Sunnah) of the Prophet SAW. Terms like *jahiliyyah*, *jihad* and the establishment of the Islamic society (*al-mujtama' al-Islami*) and state (*dawlah*) occupied most of his discussions. This seems to be the beginning of al Mawdudi's influence on Qutb's thought when the terms were used widely in Qutb's later writings. Need to mention that al Mawdudi's idea and style of writings was so forceful, rationale and impressive during those periods and ably captivate its readers. As Thameem Ushama notes, 'Mawdudi presented Islam in pristine, pure, plain and in everyday languages that appealed the mind and heart of the people without engaging in the jargons and abstract ideas....Mawdudi presented Islam as a complete code of life. It is a way of life, a culture and civilization that captivate people's heart and convinced their minds easily' [5].

**Al-Mawdudi and the Jama'at Al-Islami Movement:** Abu'l-A'la al-Mawdudi (1903–1979), the founder of the *Jama'at al-Islami* movement in Pakistan was an important figure of the twentieth-century Islamic resurgence. His ideas and thought on Islam, in addition to his political participation in the creation of Pakistan, had attracted attention outside the Indian Sub-continent, especially in other Muslim countries. Coming from a religious family, al-Mawdudi began his early education with his father,

who was known for his strictness in bringing up his children and his opposition to Western culture and education. After the death of his father, al-Mawdudi joined his brother in journalism in 1918. This year witnessed the beginnings of the National Movement in India, which encouraged al-Mawdudi to take part in the nationalist struggle against British penetration [6]. From 1924, he served as editor of several journals such as the weekly *Taj* and *al-Jami'ah* for about ten years before turning to devote himself to Islamic issues and the political movement in particular [7]. It was during the editorship of the *al-Jami'ah* that a great change took place in him as a result of an incident in 1926. Swami Shardhanand, a leader of the Shudhi (an extremist Hindu revivalist movement) was assassinated by a Muslim. In describing the incident, Adam writes:

The murder provoked a great public outcry and criticisms of Islam and the Muslims began to appear in the public press. There were accusations that Islam relies upon the sword for its propagation, charges of bloodthirstiness and repetitions of the old slander that Islam promises Paradise to those who kill an unbeliever [7].

Al-Mawdudi answered these accusations in the columns of *al-Jami'ah*. He also produced a series of articles on Islam's view on war, which were published as a book entitled *al-Jihad fi'l-Islam* in 1930 [7]. From this time on, al-Mawdudi devoted himself to a deeper study of Islamic theology to cater with the current needs and arising issues facing his country. He produced later on another book related to theology entitled *Towards Understanding Islam*. The book was originally written in Urdu entitled *Risalah Diniyyah*. It was then translated into English in 1932 [6]. The book was received with great acclaim from Muslims outside the Indian sub-continent when it was translated into Arabic and circulated along with other works by al-Mawdudi. In this regard, the Ikhwan of Egypt played an important role in its translation and circulation for the use of fellow Muslims in Egypt and other fellow Muslims outside Egypt.

It should also be noted that al-Mawdudi's decision to write seriously on Islamic issues was motivated by his feeling of responsibility to expose the nature of *jahiliyyah* surrounding Muslim society at that time and all the evil that it contained as the result of Western influences. He was able to understand Western's thought after devoting many years reading and understanding Western philosophies and ideologies. He realized that the answers

for all debated issues existed within Islam and began his fullest efforts to propagate Islam and cleared up all confusions that have been labelled against it [5]. In his opinion, Islam was a strong weapon against this danger and there was necessary to give a clear explanation to his fellow Muslims of the basics of Islamic theology such as *aqidah* and *iman* (faith). His efforts were then aimed primarily at the political authority or the ruling elite, not at the person in the street. He believed that practical social change was impossible unless the theoretical views held by the leadership were changed first. Thus, al-Mawdudi's teaching was to correct the erroneous ways of thinking among the Muslim upper classes who had been much seduced by *jahiliyyah*. In his book *Towards Understanding Islam*, for instance, al-Mawdudi emphasized the significance of faith in God to keep Muslims away from *jahiliyyah* elements:

It is the knowledge of the attributes of God, which enables man to cultivate in him the noblest of human qualities and to fashion his life in virtue and godliness. If a man does not know that there is One and only One God who is the Creator, the Ruler and the Sustainer of the Universe, he may fall a prey to false gods and offer his homage to them to solicit their favour. But if he knows the divine attribute of *tawhid* (oneness of God), there is not the least possibility of his falling a prey to this illusion [8].

The question of the future Muslim minority in the Indian sub-continent after independence was another important factor which led al-Mawdudi to change his direction of thought to Muslim welfare. He became aware of a great danger awaiting the Muslim community, owing to a clear stance from the Indian National Congress, under Gandhi's leadership, which declared that all Indians would soon constitute a single nation, regardless of their race, culture and religion and that the future government of India would be both democratic and secular [7]. At this point, al-Mawdudi saw a gradual attempt by the Congress to destroy the Muslims' identity and their sense of nationality. The adoption of a secular government would, in his view, discriminate against the minority religious groups, especially Muslims and the government itself would favour the Hinduism that was the religion of the majority. With the aim of protecting Muslim interests, al-Mawdudi, along with his close friends, founded the *Jama'at al-Islami* in August 1941. He was elected as the first leader and served the *Jama'at* until 1972. This movement was supported by Muslim activists and

notable '*ulama*' of Sub-Indian continent such as Sayyid Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali al-Nadwi and some others [9, 6]. The period from the late 1930s to the early 1940s saw al-Mawdudi producing articles and essays aimed at propagating his ideas on Islamic issues and political matters. Besides *al-Jihad fi'l-Islam* and *Towards Understanding Islam*, al-Mawdudi wrote *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* (1932) and *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (1972). Those works were regarded as important by many Muslim scholars inside and outside India. His works have been translated into other languages such as English and Arabic and circulated worldwide in many Muslim countries. Al-Mawdudi suffered illness several times and died on September 22, 1979 in Buffalo, USA. He was buried in Lahore, Pakistan [5, 6].

Through his writings, al-Mawdudi explained how Islam works in all walks of life socially, economically, politically and cultural reforms. He presented systematically the theory of Islamic State and how its' operational system. According to Mawdudi, Islamic state is based on three important principles namely *Tauhid*, *Risalah* and *Khilafah*. *Tauhid* means that sovereignty belongs to Allah alone and His commandments are the basic law and could not be argued. *Risalah* stands for the supremacy of the shari'ah; the Quran and Sunnah are the primary sources of reference. *Khilafah* stands for the vicegerency of man. This principle differentiated Islamic conception of State from Western democracy whose principles vested in people [10].

#### **The Influence of Al-Mawdudi on Sayyid Qutb's Writings:**

Qutb's interest in al-Mawdudi's Islamic thought can be traced back to the early 1950s, when many of the latter's scholarly works were translated into languages of both the Muslim and the Western worlds. Moreover, being a new member of the Ikhwan enabled Qutb to gain access to al-Mawdudi's works, since the Ikhwan, as noted earlier, had played an important part in translating and circulating the latter's ideas. Among al-Mawdudi's major works which had been translated from Urdu and English into Arabic were *Jihad in Islam*, *Islam and Jahiliyyah* and *The Principle of Islamic Government*. In 1951, al-Nadwi, a disciple and close friend of al-Mawdudi, published a book in Arabic entitled *What Did the World Lose Due to the Decline of Islam?* The book expounded clearly al-Mawdudi's thought and his views on modern *jahiliyyah* doctrine. Qutb's exposure to al-Mawdudi's ideas and his Islamic activism was also increased by al-Nadwi's visit to him in the same year. It was a great moment for Qutb as he found that many of al-Mawdudi's

ideas were in parallel and similar with the objectives for which he was struggling. Moreover, al-Mawdudi's theory of Islamic revivalism as the whole were enhanced by the painful experience of colonialism, similar to that which had been experienced by Qutb in his own country. The visit had a strong impact on Qutb political thought when both found their ideas to be in close affinity [11]. Many of Qutb's works written in the 1950s quoted al-Mawdudi's Islamic ideas and terms such as *jahiliyyah*, *hakimiyyah*, *manhaj* and *jihad*. Qutb's discussion of the *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty) of God in *Mustaqbal li hadha al-din* (Islam: The Religion of the Future), for instance, referred to al-Mawdudi's work, *The Four Terminologies in the Qur'an*. For Qutb, divine sovereignty was so comprehensive that it precludes all human sovereignty and authority. This idea was in parallel with al-Mawdudi's thought which emphasised that God is the ultimate and absolute sovereign of all creations. This sovereign exists in the sense of absolute authority belongs to God to command absolute and unquestioned obedience on the part of His creations including human beings [12].

Qutb's other work which quoted al-Mawdudi's ideas at length was *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*. In this Qur'anic commentary, the concepts of *jahiliyyah* and *hakimiyyah* were widely used by Qutb in his analysis of contemporary society. In his view, Egyptian society lived in a new *jahiliyyah* - the *jahiliyyah* of Arab nationalism as represented by the Nasserite regime. Its laws, morals and behaviour were based on *jahili* concepts and were not compatible with Islam. Qutb went further and declared that *jahiliyyah* was facing not only the Egyptians but also the whole Muslim *ummah* where their ways of life were built on the laws laid down by their own fellow men [12]. Despite imitating al-Mawdudi's idea on the need to establish Islamic society or government, Qutb however, put far less emphasis on the organization and structure of the Islamic government than he did on opposition to the un-Islamic state by referring to the existing Nasserite regimes. Any non divine authority or government was *taghut* that is irreligious and tyrannical. Al-Mawdudi on the other hand, his debate with Western political thought though was antagonistic, but it also assimilated Western ideas into his interpretation of Islam and the Islamic state. More broadly, al-Mawdudi sought to transform Islam by making it more operational. He called Muslims back to Islam but to an Islamic teaching that was rationalized and streamlined so that its social expression would be able to support a viable political order [13].

Analysing Qutb's concept of *jahiliyyah* and its usage, it seems that the term departed a little from that of al-Mawdudi's concept of *jahiliyyah*. Perhaps different

environments of these two figures were the main reason for their different understanding and application of the concept. Mawdudi's definition of *jahiliyyah* mainly referred to the way of life and thought of the ruling classes, those leaders of Muslim India and not the person in the street. Furthermore, in al-Mawdudi's view, there were two categories of *jahiliyyah* namely pure *jahiliyyah* and mixed *jahiliyyah*. Pure *jahiliyyah* rejected God completely, whereas mixed *jahiliyyah* referred to those who associated religion with infidelity and did not rule by God's order. Qutb, on the other hand, claimed that the whole world was living in a *jahili* society, which was pure *jahiliyyah*. Despite some existing difference of terms, the influence of al-Mawdudi and the *Jamaat al-Islami* upon Qutb's Islamic thought of the 1950s was paramount. Both had the same aim in their struggle that was, the return to Islam as the way of life: socially, politically and economically. It was al-Mawdudi who initially proposed the need for the establishment of an Islamic state and struggle against the Western influences upon the Muslim countries. According to Leonard Binder, Qutb's major role in transmitting the ideas of al-Mawdudi in his writings was fruitful in the 1950s when al-Mawdudi's work and personality were gradually recognised and considered so immense in the eyes of the Da'wah groups emerged in Egypt. When questioned regarding the most influential contemporary Islamic thinker, many educated Egyptian named al-Mawdudi [14]. Moreover, the emergence of Qutb's work, *Maalim fil Tariq* (Milestone) was seen by many as the climax influence of al-Mawdudi's ideas. This book became one of the most important factors that led to Qutb's execution two years later, because its content was said to have exhorted people to act against the current government of Egypt.

## CONCLUSION

Abu'l-A'la al-Mawdudi (1903–1979), became one of the important figure of the twentieth-century Islamic resurgence. His ideas and thought on Islam, in addition to his political participation in the creation of Pakistan, had attracted attention outside the Indian Sub-continent, especially in other Muslim countries including Egypt. Qutb's joining the Ikhwan in 1951 was a meaningful moment in his Islamic activism for it enabled him to read al-Mawdudi's works, which had a strong influence upon his thought and crystallized his understanding of Islam as a way of life and to reject Western's ideologue. Many of Qutb's works written in the 1950s quoted al-Mawdudi's Islamic ideas and terms such as *jahiliyyah*, *hakimiyyah*, *manhaj* and *jihad*. Qutb's discussion of the sovereignty

of God in *Mustaqbal li hadha al-din* (Islam: The Religion of the Future), for instance, referred to al-Mawdudi's works, *The Four Terminologies in the Qur'an*. Besides this book, Qutb's other work that quoted al-Mawdudi's ideas at length was *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*. More importantly, al Mawdudi's ideas provided an insight into what Qutb's had been struggling for; to make Islam governing Muslims life as it was during the Prophet's era and his companions.

## REFERENCES

1. Smith, I.K., 2010. Sayyid Abul A'la al Mawdudi, New Statesman, February 10, 2010.
2. Nooraini Sulaiman, 2002. Pembinaan Peradaban Ummah dalam Menghadapi Cabaran: Perjuangan dan pemikiran Sayyid Qutb. MA Thesis. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 16: 18-19.
3. Abu Rabi', I., 1984. Sayyid Qutb: From Religious Realism to Radical Social Criticism. Islamic Quarterly, 24: 106.
4. Qutb, S., 1952. Al-<sup>o</sup>Adalah al-Ijtima'iyah fi'l-Islam, Cairo: Matba'ah Dar al-Kitab al-<sup>o</sup>Arabi, pp: 10-20.
5. Ushama, T. and N.M. Osmani, 2006. 'Sayyid Mawdudi's Contribution Towards Islamic Revivalism'. IIUC Studies, 3: 93-104.
6. Ahmad, R., 1969. The Concept of the Islamic State as found in the writings of Abu A'la Mawdudi, unpublished Ph.D Thesis, The University of Durham, pp: 39-40, 43.
7. Adams, C.J., 1983. 'Mawdudi and the Islamic State,' in Voice of Resurgent Islam, ed. John L. Esposito, New York: Oxford University Press, pp: 99-133.
8. Mawdudi, S.A.A., 1980. Towards Understanding Islam. London: U.K Islamic Mission, pp: 22.
9. Tripp, C., 1994. 'Sayyid Qutb: The Political Vision', in Pioneers of Islamic Revivals, ed. Ali Rahnema, London: Zed Books Ltd.
10. Mawdudi, S.A.A., 1990. Islamic Law and Constitution. trans. and edited by Khurshid Ahmad. Lahore: Islamic Publication Ltd., pp: 253-262.
11. Sivan, E., 1985. Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp: 23.
12. Qutb, S., 1992. Fi Zilal al Quran. Cairo: Dar al Shuruq, 2: 891.
13. Nasr, V.R., 1996. Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism. New York: Oxford University Press, pp: 52-53.
14. Binder, L., 1988. Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp: 170-175.
15. Binder, L., 1965. Religion and Politics in Pakistan. Berkeley: University of California, pp: 82.