

Introduction

The outlook of a school of thought regarding society and history and its specific approach to them, plays a decisive role in its ideology. From this point of view, it is essential, in the context of Islamic world outlook, to throw light on the Islamic approach to society and history.

It is evident that Islam is neither a theory of society nor a philosophy of history. In the sacred Book of Islam, no social or historical problem is dealt with in the technical jargon of sociology and philosophy of history. In the same way no other problem, ethical, legal or philosophical, is discussed in the Qur'an, either in the current terms or according to the traditional classification of sciences. However, these and other problems related with various sciences can be deduced from the Book.

Islamic thinking on society and history, because of its special importance, is a topic that deserves to be studied and investigated properly, and, like its many other teachings, reveals Islam's profoundness in dealing with various issues. Since the problems that deal with society and history are closely related, and since we wish to discuss them briefly, it was apt to discuss them together in a single book. However, we shall discuss the problem related to society and history only to the extent that would help in understanding Islamic ideology.

We shall begin with society and then proceed to discuss history. Following are some of the questions that can be raised about society:

1. What is society?
2. Is man by nature social and gregarious?
3. Is it true that the individual is primary and society is secondary, or is the truth contrary to it, that is, society is primary and individual is secondary in importance? Or is there any third possible approach?
4. The relationship between society and tradition.
5. Whether the individual is free or if he is determined by society and the social structure?

6. In what institutions, poles, and groups is society classifiable according to its primary divisions?

7. Whether human societies are absolutely of the same nature and essence, their differences being similar to the differences among members of the same species? Or if they vary according to geographic variations, temporal and spatial conditions, and levels of development of their culture and civilization, assuming different forms and essences with each calling for a separate sociology based upon its particular ideology?

In other words, is a single system of sociology, ethics, and ideology applicable to all humanity, in the same way as a single system of medicine and laws of physiology applies to all human beings regardless of their geographic, racial and historical variations?

Does every society, according to its regional, cultural and historical background, require a special sociology and affirm a particular ideology?

8. Are human societies, which from the dawn of history up to the present day have been diversified and grown independent of one another, with a kind of pluralism governing them (at least in an individual if not in a generic sense), moving from plurality and diversity towards attainment of unity and homogeneity?

Does the future of humanity lie in attaining one society, one culture and one civilization, and whether at the end its plurality will be replaced by a stage of homogeneity in which all its contradictions and conflicts would be overcome and resolved? Or, contrarily, is humanity eternally condemned to multiplicity of culture and ideology, and to a pluralism that reinforces the social identity of its particular, units?

In our view, these are the relevant problems which need to be discussed from the Islamic point of view, so that these issues are brought to light and put in a proper perspective. We propose to deal briefly with these issues one by one.

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