

Sayyid Qutub's *Milestones* (Ma‘âlimFî al-Ṭarîq): A Defining Blueprint for Islamic Revival

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Abstract:

SayyidQutb, a pivotal and controversial figure in contemporary Islamic political jurisprudence, is renowned for his staunch opposition to despotism and his unwavering adherence to Islamic principles. He endured imprisonment and execution during Jamal ‘Abd al-Nâsir's era, becoming a martyr for his beliefs. His seminal work, *Ma‘âlimFî al-Ṭarîq*(Milestones), outlines a vision for the future of the Muslim community, emphasizing the need for a revival of true Islamic values and society. SayyidQutb critiques Western leadership, arguing that its moral decay disqualifies it from leading humanity. He posits that Islam, with its comprehensive values and methodology, is the only viable alternative. However, this can only be achieved through a reestablishment of a genuine Muslim community governed by Sharia. "Milestones" has been both influential and polarizing, inspiring Islamic movements and being labeled as a catalyst for jihadist ideologies, giving rise to the term "Qutbism."

Keywords:SayyidQutb, Islamic jurisprudence, Milestones, Western leadership, Shari‘a, Qutbism etc.

Introduction:

SayyidQutb (1906 -1966) ¹, a pivotal figure in modern Islamic thought, is often described as controversial, inviting a range of interpretations. Nonetheless, his central role in reviewing and renewing contemporary Islamic political jurisprudence, which had succumbed to despotism, is undeniable. SayyidQutb was a reformer who unwaveringly adhered to his firm Islamic

principles, enduring imprisonment, torture, and abuse under Jamal ‘Abd al-Nāṣir's regime. His steadfastness led to his execution on August 29, 1966, making him a martyr for his cause.

SayyidQutb's seminal work, *Ma‘ālimFî al-Ṭarîq*(Milestones), serves as a roadmap for the future of the Muslim community or those striving for its resurgence. The book delineates clear milestones, visible to both supporters and opponents, helping individuals determine their alignment with either Islam or Jâhiliyyah (ignorance or pre-Islamic state). SayyidQutb uses the term Jâhiliyyah to describe anything contrary to Islam, including beliefs, behaviors, groups, or individuals, even if they outwardly appear Islamic.

Critics of *Ma‘ālimFî al-Ṭarîq*(Milestones) argue that the book is rigid, uncompromising Islamic ideas, expressed in a direct and dignified language, pose a challenge due to their lack of conciliation. The book's central thesis asserts that Western leadership over humanity is nearing its end, not due to material bankruptcy or weakened economic and military power, but because it has depleted its moral reserves, descending into intellectual and moral decadence.

SayyidQutb argues that a new leadership must arise, one that not only preserves the material civilization achieved by humanity but also infuses it with entirely new values and a genuine, positive, and realistic methodology—values and methodology that only Islam can provide. However, Islam can only fulfill this role if embodied in a society or nation, as humanity, especially in modern times, does not heed abstract doctrines without tangible, real-life counterparts.

According to SayyidQutb, the existence of the Muslim people has been interrupted for centuries, as it is not merely defined by geography or ancestry but by adherence to Islamic methodology in all aspects of life. The restoration of this nation is essential for Islam to resume its role in leading humanity. This prospect alarms figures like Al-Bakhti, who openly rejects religions, especially Islam, and the global material systems that support this rejection. Thus, SayyidQutb has been labeled as a dangerous instigator, inspiring Islamic peoples to revolt and reject the status quo. His influence has birthed the term "Qutbism," denoting this ideological shift.

In *Ma'âlimFî al-Ṭarîq*(Milestones), SayyidQutb outlines these ideas with clarity and conviction, providing a blueprint for those seeking to restore the true essence of the Muslim people.²

Life of SayyidQutub:

SayyidQutb was an Egyptian Islamic thinker, writer, and literary figure, considered one of the most important contemporary Islamic thinkers and the major inspirations behind modern Islamic Movements. He belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood and was executed in 1966. He engaged in intellectual and political battles, leaving behind dozens of works and hundreds of articles, among which his interpretation *FîZilâl al- Qur'ân*(In the Shade of the Qur'ân) stood out, offering a new reading of the Holy Qur'ân.

Birth and Early Life

SayyidQutb Ibrahim Husayn Al-Shadhli was born on October 9, 1906, in the village of Musha (Asyut Governorate) in Egypt, to a family of Indian origin with moderate means. His father was affiliated with the "National Party," and his mother was deeply religious. SayyidQutb studied the Holy *Qur'ân* with village tutors and completed it in the fourth year of his elementary education (1912-1918). He never married.

Education and Training

He attended the Teachers College in Cairo and obtained its certificate. Later, he enrolled in the College of Arts at Dâr Al-'Ulûm, which offered both modern and traditional education, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1933. During his time in Cairo, he lived with his uncle Ahmed Hussein Al-Moushi, a poet, journalist, and politician.

Employment and Responsibilities

SayyidQutb worked as a primary school teacher to finance his university education. He also worked in journalism from a young age to meet the challenges of life, especially after his family settled in Cairo following his father's death. He held administrative and educational positions in the Ministry of Education and was sent by the ministry to the United States in 1948 to specialize in education and curriculum development. After returning, he resigned from the ministry in

1952. He was offered a ministerial position in the Revolutionary Command Council after the 1952 revolution but declined, although he spent months advising the council.

Intellectual Orientation

SayyidQutb was influenced in the late twenties and thirties by the thinker Abbas Al-'Aqqâd, with whom he later disagreed. It is said that he had an association with the Islamic "Hizb Al-Tahrir" party. His Islamic writings, especially his book "Social Justice in Islam" since 1947, paved the way for his formal affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, which he officially joined in 1953. He became a member of its guidance bureau, responsible for the propagation department, and the editor-in-chief of the "Muslim Brotherhood" newspaper until it was shut down in 1954.

Intellectual Experience

SayyidQutb's journey was coloured by his rural upbringing and artistic ideals, and he did not accept moderate solutions in the intellectual and political battles he fought, especially with Ahmad Shawqî, Muṣṭafâ Al-Rafî'i, TahaHusayn, and later with the Egyptian political regime.

His writings ranged from pure literature to diverse political and Islamic intellectual and activist works. He was one of the best essay writers in many newspapers and magazines, including "Al-Risalah," "Al-Balagh," "Al-Uṣbu' Al-Siyasiyah," "Al-Ahrâm," "Al-Hayah Al-Jadidah," and "Al-Jihâd." His articles continued to provoke battles and angry responses, and he was known for his aversion to communism and capitalism.

In the forties, he began his dominance in prose, finding himself in it, and wrote poetry and novels, but his poetic production almost stopped around 1950.

SayyidQutb's political writings began in the late 1940s, but gained more prominence after the revolution against the monarchy in 1952 and his imprisonment. His maturity was manifested in his writings in the early 1960s, especially in his book "Milestones".

He admired, in the political field, the "Wafd" Party, and upon its division, he leaned towards the "Sa'adiyun" faction. However, he eventually distanced himself from all parties,

saying: "I no longer see in any of these parties anything worth the effort of enthusiasm and working for."

He is considered one of the most important ideologists of the 1952 revolution, led by officers with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the subsequent events of the revolution ended the alliance between the two sides, leading to the dissolution of the Brotherhood and Qutb's arrest in early 1954.

Following the "Manshiya incident" on October 26, 1954 - allegedly planned to assassinate President Jamal 'Abd al-Nâsir - the Brotherhood was accused, and hundreds of its members, including Qutb, were arrested. SayyidQutb was sentenced to life imprisonment and endured severe torture. He was released in May 1964 but re-arrested months later.

In 1957, he witnessed the massacre of Islamist detainees in the Tura Prison, which led him to judge the ruling regime as "a system of disbelief".

SayyidQutb had a significant intellectual influence on contemporary Islamic movements, with his approach focusing on two main concepts: "governance" and "contemporary ignorance (Jâhiliyyah)". Dozens of books and research papers were written about his life, journey, and ideas.

Among his famous quotes: "I have moved from a period of life in the shade of the Qur'ân to a firm and decisive belief that there is no reform for this earth, no peace for this humanity, no tranquility for this individual, no elevation, no blessing, no purity, and no harmony with the laws of the universe and the nature of life except by returning to Allah."

He continued, "The return to Allah has one form and one path... it is the return of all life to the method of Allah, which He outlined for humanity in His Noble Book. It is the governance of this Book alone in its life, and referring to it alone in its affairs, otherwise it is corruption on earth, misery for people, regression into mud, and the ignorance that worships desires instead of Allah."³

His Literary Works:

He began his literary career in 1936 with his book "The Mission of the Poet in Life," followed by more than twenty books that garnered great interest among Islamic circles worldwide, including: "Child of the Village" (autobiography, 1946), "Literary Criticism: Principles and Methods," "Artistic Representation in the Quran," "Characteristics of Islamic Visualization," "The Future of This Religion," and *FîZilâl al-Qur'ân* (In the Shade of the Qur'ân) (1951-1964). His books were translated into foreign languages.

Death

He was sentenced to death by hanging on charges of attempting to overthrow the ruling regime and was executed at dawn on August 29, 1966.⁴

Description:

SayyidQutb says, "Islam is a realistic religion that understands prohibitions and directives alone are not sufficient, and that religion cannot exist without a state and without authority. Religion is the method or system upon which people's practical lives is based, and it is not merely sentimental feelings that live in the conscience without authority, legislation, a defined method, and a known constitution."

SayyidQutb needs no introduction, being the name associated with his famous book "Milestones," not to mention his clear stance against the rule of Jamal 'Abd al-Nâsir. SayyidQutb went through many stages in his life from childhood, including a purely literary phase influenced by Abbas Al-'Aqqâd, then an intellectual phase, progressing to Islamic literature, and then into the political arena until he became a pioneer of Islamic activist thought, or what is known as "Qutbism." This latter stage is how people know him to this day.

SayyidQutb theorized the establishment of an Islamic state in both form and substance through his writings during his imprisonment, particularly in his book "Milestones," which caused a great stir in Egypt and beyond. The book's key points revolved around the bankruptcy of humanity in the realm of values. Therefore, there must be leadership for humanity that possesses values and is capable of maintaining and developing the material civilization humanity has achieved, and Islam, which possesses these values and this method, must be that leader.

Among the most important points he mentioned is that there must be an Islamic revival to once again play its anticipated role in leading humanity. The book "Milestones" contains significant points about building an Islamic state, not a secular one, which led to attacks on SayyidQutb. In fact, SayyidQutbsays that the book received much celebration and condemnation from those who either passionately supported it or stood against it. This level of reaction is rare in the history of Egypt. According to him, "Milestones" offers a vision from an Islamic perspective and is considered one of the most influential books in Arab culture, even according to its critics. SayyidQutb is seen as one of the makers of Egypt's history.

Tarîq Al-Zumar, a former leader in the Islamic Group, commented that he sees SayyidQutb as presenting in his book a comprehensive political, social, and economic vision that still retains its credibility today. Hussâm'Aql, a professor of criticism and literature at Ayn Shams University, believes that under an authority seeking to eradicate and uproot, it is natural for counter-thought to emerge. Mamdûh Al-Shaykh concurred, saying, "The authority at that time bears some responsibility for the emergence of SayyidQutb and his ideas."

The book "Milestones" presents various views, the most important of which is the concept of Jahiliyyah (ignorance) that has spread. In fact, SayyidQutbbrought the issue of ignorance in today's world of Muslim people. Hussâm'Aql saw this as a frightening proposition. SayyidQutb says in "Milestones," "Today we are living in a Jahiliyyah like that which Islam confronted, or even darker. Everything around us is Jahiliyyah: people's perceptions and beliefs, their habits and traditions, their sources of culture, their arts and literature."

SayyidQutb produced the concept of the "camp of disbelief" and the "camp of faith" in the manner later adopted by Islamic groups in their military struggle against the West and governments. However, the Islamic preacher and researcher EssamTelima believes that there is not a single letter in all of SayyidQutb's books that calls for the spilling of any human blood, not even the blood of Jamal 'Abd al-Nâsir or the Egyptian Revolutionary Command Council.

In his book, SayyidQutb made an advocacy for building an Islamic state and rejecting a secular state, because the Islamic religion and our Islamic civilization are capable of creating a world advanced in its culture and our Islamic values that we were created with. Before his execution by Jamal 'Abd al-Nâsir, which turned from an execution to an honorary celebration

held by the officers of the July 23, 1952 Revolution (which overthrew the monarchy in Egypt) for Sayyid Qutb in the presence of Abd al-Nāṣir and a large audience of officers, diplomats, writers, and interested parties in the Zamalek area, Sayyid Qutb said, "The revolution has truly begun, and we should not praise it because it has not yet done anything noteworthy. The removal of the king is not the goal of the revolution; rather, the goal is to return the country to Islam."

Sayyid Qutb continued, "During the monarchy, I was prepared for prison at any moment, and I do not feel safer in this era either, and for reasons beyond prison more than before." Therefore, Taha Hussein, who was responsible for Sayyid Qutb in the Ministry of Education, said, "Sayyid Qutb has reached the peak and leadership in literature as well as in serving Egypt and Islamic Arabism." There were many tongues wagging about Sayyid Qutb, and his ideas were classified as dark thoughts. He was subjected to incitement campaigns and his image was narrowly confined to that of an extremist, closed-minded, takfiri personality.

Sayyid Qutb was one of the foremost thinkers who presented Islam with its comprehensiveness, vitality, and suitability for every time and place, along with its ability to govern and address the problems of civilization while achieving a balance between spiritual and material needs. He was among the prominent writers who criticized Western civilization, which claims democracy, and exposed capitalism. Qutb focused on the principle of sovereignty and returning legislation to God, ruling by what God has revealed. He called for a focus on Islamic educational and activist meanings.

Sayyid Qutb dedicated his life to the struggle for a tangible, real idea, driven by his strong belief in the value of the Islamic religion and his vehement rejection of the secular state as a Western project. He criticized Western civilization and exposed Western colonialism and its ambitions in the region. His famous article "America and Islam," published in the magazine "Al-Risalah" in 1952, exposed America's policy and its agents in the region (whether Arab or American). Sayyid Qutb suffered accusations of unbelief against Muslim societies, and his accusers, especially secular, leftist researchers, and opponents of the Islamic trend, used fragmented texts to prove this. It appears that Sayyid Qutb vehemently rejected the establishment of a secular state.⁵

It has been observed that there is a wide cultural disparity between neighboring civilizations. Sayyid Qutb played a fundamental role in imposing Islamic civilization to restore its radiance and compete with foreign (secular) civilizations. Democratic and socialist ideas emerged, but all terms and ideas can be placed in one category, and the term secularism in another category for several reasons, most notably the religious term, especially with the nature of Islamic civilization based on religion and distinguished by it. This posed significant problems in the early translation movement when it was in a position of strength, let alone in a position of weakness.

Secularism was introduced to separate religion from the state and to combat all Islamic religion in the Arab world. Writer Mohammed Abid Al-Jabrī says in this context, "Secularism in the Arab world is a fake issue that is inconsistent with Islamic reality. It's as if the secularists imported the problem and the solution." There is no doubt that Western civilization posed the greatest challenge to the nation since the early nineteenth century, and the West was able to achieve some military and political victories over the nation, most notably the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate after World War II and the establishment of a nationalist state. Sayyid Qutb opposed this concept along with his brother Muhammad Qutb and the Islamic trend.

Therefore, Muhammad Qutb responded to the prominent theories upon which Western secular civilization was based, such as Darwin's theories of evolution and Marx's theories on the development of production means and their impact on human life, and Freud's theories on sexuality and its impact on individual behavior. This was to preserve the value and ideas of Islamic religion. On the other hand, Sayyid Qutb expressed an immense Islamic and national revolutionary spirit that was an incentive for the youth of his generation and those after them to confront politicians, secular intellectuals, corrupt scholars, and corrupt regimes. He highlighted Islam with its dynamic practical spirit that rejects injustice and stands up for the oppressed, wresting legitimacy from tyrants, affirming that legitimacy belongs only to God.

Sayyid Qutb was one of the foremost thinkers who presented Islam with its comprehensiveness, vitality, and suitability for every time and place, rejecting the secular concepts and cultures propagated by the West and defended by the political elite like Jamal 'Abd al-Nâsir. Sayyid Qutb was one of the leading figures in Islamic thought, reform, and renewal in the twentieth century who defended Islam.⁶

Discussion:

SayyidQutb was a prominent Islamic thinker, writer, and activist whose ideas significantly influenced modern Islamic movements. SayyidQutb adopted the concept of "Hakimiyyah" from AbulA'laMaududi, emphasizing that sovereignty belongs only to God. This idea is rooted in the Kharijite tradition but was repurposed by SayyidQutb to argue against secular governance and for the establishment of an Islamic state. He vehemently opposed secularism, viewing it as a Western construct incompatible with Islamic principles. He believed that religion cannot exist without a state and authority, and that Islam provides a comprehensive system for governance and societal organization.

In fact, he brought forth theory about establishing an Islamic state through his writings, especially in "Milestones," which critiqued various secular ideologies and called for a revival of Islamic leadership to address the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of contemporary civilizations. SayyidQutb's ideas have had a profound impact on Islamic thought, particularly through his book "Milestones," which has inspired both support and opposition. His concepts of "Jahiliyyah" (ignorance) and the dichotomy of the "camp of disbelief" versus the "camp of faith" became foundational for many Islamic groups' ideological frameworks.

Despite accusations of promoting extremism, SayyidQutb's supporters argue that his works do not explicitly call for violence but rather focus on the need for a comprehensive Islamic state. He was critical of Western civilization, democracy, capitalism, and socialism, arguing that these systems failed to provide moral and spiritual guidance. He believed that only Islam could fulfill this role, promoting values that align with both material progress and spiritual well-being.

Here it is worth mentioning that SayyidQutub's writings, especially "Milestones," are considered highly influential in the development of contemporary Islamic thought. They continue to be referenced by various Islamic groups and scholars in discussions about the role of Islam in modern governance and society. SayyidQutb's contributions to Islamic thought centered on the rejection of secularism, the promotion of an Islamic state governed by Sharia, and the critique of Western ideologies. His works remain influential and controversial, reflecting his enduring impact on modern Islamic movements.

Conclusion:

SayyidQutb is a seminal figure in modern Islamic thought, known for his advocacy of an Islamic state governed by divine sovereignty (Hakimiyyah). He vehemently opposed secularism, viewing it as a Western imposition incompatible with Islamic principles. In his pivotal book *Ma‘âlimFî al-Ṭarîq*(Milestones),Qutb critiqued secular ideologies—democracy, capitalism, and socialism—arguing that only Islam could provide the necessary moral and spiritual guidance. His vision of an Islamic state was a call to action for governance based on Islamic values and Sharia law. Concepts like "Jâhiliyyah" (ignorance) and the division between the "camp of disbelief" and the "camp of faith" influenced many Islamic groups, both moderate and radical. Despite accusations of extremism, Qutb's supporters assert his works promote an authentic Islamic way of life rather than violence. His critique of Western civilization and emphasis on Islam's comprehensive applicability make him a pivotal and controversial figure, with a lasting impact on modern Islamic thought.

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