

## ***Islam and Democracy: In the Light of Thoughts of Maulana Abu Ala Mawdudi***

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### ***Abstract***

*Sayyed Abu Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979) was an eminent religious scholar, highly prolific & insightful intellectual, author of many significant books, translator of Holy Qur'an and founder of Jama'at-Islami. His phenomenal political and scholarly career is manifested in enormous contributions for Muslims of subcontinent especially Pakistan. Besides his other contributions, he presented the concept of democracy in Islam.*

*Sovereignty being the dominant aspect; he unequivocally narrated that in Islamic polity, sovereignty remains with Almighty Allah and people would use the powers within limits prescribed by Allah. This concept is entirely different from Western democracy wherein supreme law making authority vests with people.*

*He termed it as theo-democracy, and kingdom of God where government of people is an agency to ensure the Islamic laws enshrined in Qur'an and Sunnah were enforced without injustice and exploitation. He was the staunch supporter of Islamic democracy and remained antagonistic to dictatorship.*

*He explained the dynamics of democracy and Islam with convergences and divergences as well as similarities and differences while presenting his own political model in the light of Islamic philosophy.*

***Keywords:*** *Maulana Mawdudi, Islamic polity, democracy, sovereignty, theo-democracy, Qur'an and Sunnah.*

### ***Introduction***

Sayyed Abu Ala Mawdudi; a great religious scholar, statesman, politician, author, founding-father of *Jama'at-Islami*, and political activist, was born in a religious family in

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Aurangabad (Hyderabad Deccan) on 25 September 1903 (3 Rajab 1321). He was the descendant from the family of Khwaja Qutubuddin Maudood Chishti; a sufi saint of Afghanistan whose message and teachings reached subcontinent through his disciple Khwajah Mu'inu'ddin of Ajmer<sup>1</sup>; Chishti spiritual luminaries such as Khwajah Mu'inu'ddin Muhammad Chishti (1132-1246), came from the spiritual line of Qutbu'ddin Mawdud<sup>2</sup>. His father, Syed Ahmad Hasan Mawdudi, an advocate by profession, was educated from Aligarh but abhorred British imperialism and their way of life, and therefore did not send his child to English schools and employed tutors for various subjects.

Maulana had a proud legacy; was the descendant of the Chishtisufi order<sup>3</sup>, an important aspect in his rise<sup>4</sup>, and in 1932 he claimed with euphoria that "I belong to one such family that has a 1,300-year history of guiding, asceticism and Sufism."<sup>5</sup> He obtained his early education at home, then joined Madrasah *Furqaniyah* and *DarulUloom* Hyderabad. He acquired an essential expertise in English, Persian and Urdu; and generally, it was self-acquired. His intellectual growth was the result of his enormous interest; he also excelled in moral aspects, as expected because of religious background and high ideals of life like piety, uprightness, and righteousness formulated an essential part of his personality<sup>6</sup>. After receiving his traditional education and supplementing it with self-acquired knowledge of Western thoughts<sup>7</sup>, he decided to pursue the writing (journalism) career; he therefore moved to Bijnur in United Provinces. In 1918, Mawdudi finally decided to pursue a writing career. He moved to Bijnur in the United Provinces, where he joined Madinah as journalist along with his brother, Abu'l-Khayr<sup>8</sup>, and later on joined *Taj* of Jabalpure<sup>9</sup>.

Then he moved Delhi, joined weekly *Muslim* (1921-3) and then became the editor of daily *Jamiat* (1925-28)<sup>10</sup>, Delhi; an outspoken newspaper essentially opposed to British colonialism and Hindu domination. He contributed significantly in its credibility as one of the distinguished newspapers of India but left it once it adopted pro-Congress perspective. He then in 1932, started his own journal titled *Tarjuman al-Quran* to inspire the Muslim Nationalism and soon it became famous amongst the Muslims. The great philosopher and poet of the orient, Dr.

Muhammad Iqbal was also the subscriber to this journal. Iqbal was a great admirer of Maulana Mawdudi's thoughts and knowledge about Islam and sought his assistance in compiling work on Islamic jurisprudence<sup>11</sup>.

Maulana Mawdudi started taking part in politics and the first notable political contribution was his role during *Khilafat* Movement triggered by Muslims of Indian subcontinent to save the institution of *Khilafat* from dismemberment / disintegration by Allied Powers after the World War-I (1914-8). He persuaded Muslims to migrate towards Afghanistan as India had become *darulharb*. Movement could not succeed and he again started contributing in academic, religious and research domains. Maulana Mawdudideveloped / perfected his political views; established the political party *Jammat-i Islami* in 1940 based on religious orientations to determine the political future of Muslims.

He was against the British colonialism, aspired freedom and unequivocally said that "To put an end to the British rule is absolutely necessary, rather obligatory. No true Muslim can reconcile himself to slavery<sup>12</sup>. He advocated democracy in no uncertain terms saying that: "No sane person can oppose democracy *per se*, and say that India should opt for monarchy autocracy or any other form of government<sup>13</sup>. He was elected the first *Ameer* of *Jama'at-Islami* till 1972 when he withdrew because of his ailing health.

Maulana Mawdudi was an eminent scholar who contributed over 120 books and pamphlets besides over 1000 speeches / press statements. His monumental work *Al-Jihad fil Islam*, was highly appreciated by Dr Muhammad Iqbal. Widely acclaimed commentary of Qur'an titled '*Tafhim al-Quran*' in six volumes was another praiseworthy contribution. Maulana had an immense influence of Qur'an on his personality and he himself stated that:

*"But when I was awakened and studied the Holy Qur'an, I felt that I had now laid hands on the very root of knowledge. The greatest thinkers of the west like Kant, Hegel, Marks and others were reduced to dwarfs. The book alone is my guide and philosopher – my real benefactor. It has transformed me. It has elevated me from the animal to human level. It is like the master key that can open every lock. I have no words to express my sense of gratitude to the Lord who bestowed upon us such a Book<sup>14</sup>."*

Maulana Mawdudi had a certain political perspective, and gave the idea of Islamic democracy while criticizing the western democracy on the basis of opposing / conflicting concepts of sovereignty. He believed that the time of Holy Prophet (PBHU) and the Pious Caliphate was the best time – “the embodiment and epitome of the Islamic way of life”<sup>15</sup> to be emulated by the Muslim world. His articles were compiled into a book titled *Musalman Aur Maujooda Siyasi Kashmakash*. Quaid-i-Azam, a true visionary understood eminent stature of Maulana Mawdudi as well as the position of *Jama'at-Islami*. That's why on being approached to join *Jamaat-e-Islami*, he explained that there was certainly no conflict between the League and Jamaat; the *Jama'at-Islami* was struggling for a higher ideal while League had the realization of immediate need, which is need attained would make the mission of *Jama'at-Islami* impossible<sup>16</sup>.

Because of ceaseless efforts of Maulana Mawdudi and Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan, Objectives Resolution was passed on March 12, 1949 and included in the preamble of constitutions as complete sovereignty of Allah was accepted in it<sup>17</sup>.

*“The original ideologues of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood organization (that eventually spread across the Arab world), were directly influenced by Mawdudi's writings. Mawdudi's writings also influenced the rise of 'Islamic' regimes in Sudan in the 1980s, and more importantly, the same writings were recycled by the ZiaulHaq dictatorship (1977-88), to indoctrinate the initial batches of Afghan insurgents (the 'mujahideen'), fighting against Soviet troops stationed in Afghanistan”.*<sup>18</sup>

He carried out extensive tours to the world, gave lectures, and delivered inspiring speeches directly influencing many people<sup>19</sup>. He passed away on 22 September 1979, at the age of 76 and was buried at his residence at *Ichhra* Lahore. He will be remembered for his gigantic and phenomenal contributions in the political, religious, cultural, socio-economic, and academic spheres<sup>20</sup>.

### ***Political Thoughts of Maulana Mawdudi***

Maulana Mawdudi was a scholar and political activist; and had a political perspective which was on the lines of Islamic ideology. He had been perhaps “the most systematic modern Muslim writer”<sup>21</sup> in modern world. He was the supporter of

Islamic democracy and fought against the dictatorship<sup>22</sup>. His political thoughts generally revolve around the Islamic concepts of *Hukumat-illahiyah* and *Iqamat-i-Din*, connoting the establishment of a God's government, while adhering to the to the commandments of the *Shariat*<sup>23</sup>. He out-rightly rejected the efforts of many scholars equating Islam with either democracy, communism, or dictatorship and considered them misguided people with least understanding of social and political system of Islam, he instead believed that Islam had a peculiar system which was different from others<sup>24</sup>.

He termed it as God's Kingdom; involving ethical, political, economic, social, cultural, judicial, and ethical aspects of individuals and their personal character. It would certainly not separate the personal and public life of individuals as both are integrated with each other<sup>25</sup>; *Shariat* rather covers all aspects of the live of individuals.

The basic / foundation of Maulana Mawdudi's thoughts was on the concept of sovereignty; in Islamic democracy, sovereignty remains with Almighty Allah and He is the Supreme Law Giving authority. All Muslims, in their individual and collective capacity, submit / surrender themselves in front of the sovereignty of the Allah<sup>26</sup> once they recite *kalima* and accept the oneness of Allah (*tawhid*). *Allah alone is the sovereign.*

*Allah says in Qura'an that "Say: O Allah! Owner of Sovereignty!" (Surah Al Imran: 26)* Allah is "the owner of sovereignty". Indeed, He is the King of Kings, since the lives and destinies of all earthly kings are in His hands. It is as Allah says: "*Blessed is He for whom sovereignty is in His hand.*" (*Surah al-Mulk: 1*) And thus He is the "*True King*" who has "*sovereignty of the heavens and the Earth*"<sup>27</sup>. Since Allah is the Supreme Law Giver, therefore no one can change the laws ordained by Almighty Allah, even the prophets cannot change them.

If the complete population of Muslims are united together to change a law, already ordained in Qur'an they cannot change. Here lies the difference; this concept differs from western democracy, wherein people are supreme power in law making, they can make / amend laws, even if the majority of the people are agreed on some unethical law, it is bound to

become law. But in Islamic political philosophy, no one else, other than Allah, is authorized to make laws<sup>28</sup>. Allah says in Sura Al Noor (24:41) “Do you not see that Allah is exalted by whomever is within the heavens and the earth and (by) the birds with wings spread (in flight)? Each (of them) has known his (means of) prayer and exalting (Him), and Allah is Knowing of what they do”<sup>29</sup>.

This concept is described in Sura Yusuf (12:40) as “the authority rests with none but Allah. He commands you not to surrender to any one save Him. This is the right way (of life)”<sup>30</sup>. Holy Qur’an (3:153) unequivocally narrated as ‘They ask: “have we got some authority?” say: “all authority belongs to God alone”’<sup>31</sup>. Maulana Mawdudi is explicit in reiterating that God is the only Law Giver, and absolute authority to make law remains with him; and the believers cannot make, modify or change the law already defined by the Law Giver; they have only limited powers, given by God, to make laws. No person, group or class, majority or complete population can have the sovereignty as Allah alone is the sovereign. Therefore, in Islamic polity, Allah has already laid down laws through Qur’an and His Prophet (PBUH), and the Islamic government is just a political agency to enforce / implement those laws. This aspect is an antithesis of Western democracy where people are sovereign in making / amending laws as per their mood and temper<sup>32</sup>. Muslim representatives have some limited powers which they will use as a sacred trust within the limited prescribed to them<sup>33</sup>.

The Article-4 of the Constitution of Jama’at Islami, wherein contributions of Maulana Mawdudi were significant, stated that:

*“The Jama’at uses the terms of ‘Divine Order’ or ‘Islamic Way of Life’ in the same sense in which the Qur’an uses the term of ‘establishment of al-Deen’. The three mean the same that man must accept willingly the law-giving Order of Allah in those spheres of human life in which he has been given discretion in the same manner in which every part of the universe submits willingly or unwillingly to His physical empire. The way of life that emerges as a result of willing acceptance of Allah’s law-giving Order is called ‘al-Deen’, ‘Divine Order’, or ‘Islamic Way of Life’”<sup>34</sup>.*

Maulana Mawdudi used the name “theocracy” for Islamic state but this theocracy was squarely different which

West experienced in Middle Ages in the form of unusual papal authority and exploitation by the ecclesiastical class (before and after Reformation of Professor Martin Luther) and had fought brutal religious wars including Thirty Years War (1618-1648)<sup>35</sup>. He rather coined a new term “theo-democracy” connoting the Divide democratic government as in Muslim political philosophy absolute powers are not with the representatives rather limited powers are given under the suzerainty of Almighty Allah. Those limits are described as *Hadud Allah* in the form of checks and balances which establish the sovereignty of Allah and prescribe the limitations of the believers<sup>36</sup>.

### ***Divergences / Differences with Wester Democracy***

Islam, Islamic believes and Islamic democracy, polity differ with western democracy in terms of concept of sovereignty, secularism, narrow nationalism<sup>37</sup>, women liberty and unbridled liberalism. Western civilization is formulated on their bitter religious experiences throughout the Medieval Period starting from Fall of Roman Empire in 476 AD to Renaissance and Protestant Reformation in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>38</sup>.

It abandoned the age of faith and adopted the reason and logical thinking on the basis of enlightenment of mind whereas Islamic civilization is the enlightenment of heart<sup>39</sup> and soul basing on the spiritual, intellectual spirit without the material / physical gains, preferences and evidences. Western polity keeps, very surprisingly away the personal life from public life and religion has been relegated to personal life without having any influences in one’s public life. Barack Obama in his speech in 2006 said:

*“Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, William Jennings Bryan, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King—indeed, the majority of great reformers in American history—were not only motivated by faith, but repeatedly used religious language to argue for their cause,” Obama said. “To say that men and women should not inject their ‘personal morality’ into public policy debates is a practical absurdity”.*<sup>40</sup>

If God is important in personal life and not important in public life, then the criterion to consider it important and unimportant is to be revisited. If God is such a nominal / unimportant in one’s life, then why to include in one’s personal life too. Western no more believe that religion is a sacred

canopy or sole organizer and arbiter of human society<sup>41</sup>. Samuel Huntington wrote in his famous book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* that “religion is the central defining characteristics of civilizations”<sup>42</sup>.

Many orientalist subscribe that Muslims are resistant to liberal democracy because of antimodern and religio-cultural aspects<sup>43</sup>. West and Muslims are considered a constant conflation<sup>44</sup> by the Western scholars in terms of civic life; and the Western modern political system is beset with unprecedented problems. For instance, the narrow-nationalism of Hitler, Mussolini and others has brought untold miseries to human being including the world wars. The unbridled liberty has affected the social, moral values of many regions and has devastated their social fabric besides bringing many social curses in their countries along with ruining the family system.

Women independence, liberty and “equality” are not in their true spirit but to spread obscenity, mix-gathering, and free-sex in the name of equality and socialization. This very aspect of the Western society has made Islamic polity very apprehensive and insecure and this aspect along with concept of sovereignty in western democracy carry most of the clash between the two cultures.

### ***Model of Islamic Democracy***

The establishment of Government / state is to make sure of observance of right measures, social justice, preventing people from exploiting each other, safeguarding their liberty and protecting them from foreign invasions. Allah said in Holy Qur’an (4:58) that “Truly God commands you to give back trusts to those to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice”<sup>45</sup>. Maulana Mawdudi has explained the model of Islamic democracy, in the light of teaching of Qur’an and Sunnah which is certainly different from the western democracy. It has following essential aspects: -

- Democracy is certainly not Arabic word; but a Greek work, combination of *demos* (people) and *kratia* (rule) meaning rule of the people<sup>46</sup> thereby reposing sovereignty in western democracy with the people whereas in Islamic political system sovereignty remains with Almighty Allah only, without being shared by anyone<sup>47</sup>. People can make laws in the light of Qur’anic injunctions but cannot legislate on the

laws already laid out in Holy Qur'an<sup>48</sup>. They will also use it as a sacred trust within the prescribed limits. Power to legislation with the people has resulted in unethical, immoral legislations, against common sense, logic and reason about abortion, same-sex marriage, usurious interest (*riba*), adultery / fornication and drinking wine<sup>49</sup> which have unequivocally been forbidden in Qur'an. Therefore, in Islamic polity, such legislation, on the pretext of agreeing by the majority, contrary to the western democracy, is unthinkable. Allah said in *Sura Ghafir* (40:12) that "so the judgment is only with Allah, the Most High, the Most Great"<sup>50</sup>.

- In Islam, there is a concept of viceregency (*khalifa*) rather than sovereignty. Allah said in *Sura Nur* in Qur'an (24:55): "Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them"<sup>51</sup>.

As sovereignty belongs to Allah alone, anyone capable enough to ensure the orders of Supreme Ruler within the limits prescribed by the injunctions is worthy to become the vicegerent<sup>52</sup>. In Islam, everyone can become ruler; it is not the right of some specific person, group, family or class but all believers are the vicegerents or caliphs of God. Holy Prophet (PBUH) said that "every one of you is a ruler and everyone is answerable for his subjects"<sup>53</sup>.

Islam therefore is against dictatorship, monarchy, oligarchy, plutocracy or the dynastical rule. It is democratic in the sense that it is the rule of common people but different from democracy that the person who believes in Islamic ideology, and has the desire, will and pledge to ensure the injunctions of Supreme Ruler enshrined in Holy Qur'an. Therefore, no class difference, superiority, totalitarianism and dictatorship in this system.

Even a negro is appointed even then the believers will obey; then dictatorship cannot emerge as the same right to become the *khalifa* by fellow-Muslims have been surrendered in favour of the incumbent

*khalifa* therefore, he cannot violate their trust by embarking upon the totalitarianism and dictatorship<sup>54</sup>.

All believers are equal and have the equal rights; Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

*“An Arab is not better than a non-Arab and a non-Arab is not better than an Arab, and a red (i.e. white tinged with red) person is not better than a black person and a black person is not better than a red person except in piety”*<sup>55</sup>.

- Since all sane believers are worthy to become the *khalifa* therefore, they or the chosen representative will be consulted before the “permitted legislation” or taking actions affecting their public or personal life. Therefore, the process of consultation or *Shoor* will be ensured which will be about the new matters arising<sup>56</sup> not on the matters already written in *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*. *Shoor* is an advisory council whose recommendations are not binding on the *Ameer* but he should consider these. If *Ameer* considers them appropriate, he can follow but the final decision would be with *Ameer*; because responsibility reposes with him.
- Islamic state is an ideological state and is an instrument to reform. It should be ruled by the people / representatives who believe on this ideology<sup>57</sup>. Representatives create an ambiance where Muslims could lead their lives, without hindrance and obstacles, according to the teachings of Islam; they guide the lives of Muslims to the injunctions of Islam and let minorities live according their own religion, culture and civilization. Minorities’ rights are as sacred as the rights of the Muslims, after they pay tax to Muslim government. A Study by Oxford described that:

*“The status and treatment of minorities in Muslim societies (or, more generally, under Islamic law) has always been of special concern to outside powers seeking to establish themselves as their protectors. It has also been a favorite subject of Western Orientalists who perceived it as a major source of internal schism. Non-Muslim neighbors and observers in the modern age no longer content themselves with traditional notions of tolerance and the absence of persecution, but expect full social, political, and legal equality of Muslims and non-Muslims. Their critical regard has called forth strong reactions from many Muslims who try to show that Islam has in fact a much better record of protecting minority rights than have other civilizations, particularly the West”*<sup>58</sup>.

- Islamic democracy, political system, and the way of government is all-inclusive without the segregation of personal and public life. It equally applied the teachings in private as well as public life. It might look as dictatorship or fascism while imposing its will but certainly it gives an enormous liberty to human being in actions and asks the believers to choose the middle way. But certainly, Islam is not the personal matter, like in Western civilization, but private and public life are part of the Islamic polity<sup>59</sup>. The government which is just a machinery cannot be a despotic in nature.
- Islam is a political identity and allegiance<sup>60</sup> encompassing all aspects of life and Islam should be the central factor shaping the dynamics the Islamic societies<sup>61</sup> and Maulana Mawdudi believed that in all setups including social, political, and economic should be determined on the Islamic lines.
- Islam and Islamic political system does not permit the exploitation of rights of the fellow Muslims as well as minorities. Injustice, bribery, nepotism, dishonesty, corruption, and other such curses have not been permitted in the society under the Islamic government system.
- Islamic political system necessarily needs the right people / person be chosen. Islamic world suffered from dynastical rules for significant period of time because of lack of consciousness amongst the Muslims. People must be well aware and must have requisite consciousness; they should be able to choose the right person and should have the courage not to let him impose his tyranny or un-Islamic measures. They should also not be choosing the *ameer* on the basis of petty interests, *asbiyyat*, greed or fear<sup>62</sup>; they should only be guided by the instructions given to them by Qur'an and Sunnah. Pakistan is still suffering from this phenomenon for not choosing the right leadership in the elections.

### **Conclusion**

Islam is a complete code of life; provides guidance to the believers as well as complete humanity on all aspects of life. Politics, state, and political machinery are integral to human life therefore, Islam unequivocally ordains clear injunction. Maulana Mawdudi, an eminent religious scholar, political

thinker and the reformer has, very comprehensively, explained the phenomenon of Islamic political system based on sovereignty of God, viceregency of believers, *shoora*, and utilization of the “delegated rights” within the prescribed limits. He also believes that Islam cannot be equated on the lines of Western democracy as it differs on many aspects including the stance of sovereignty, narrow-nationalism, women liberty, secularism, and turning a blind eye on all the social evils existing in abundance in Western societies.

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