

Sayyid Qutb

Sayyid Qutb, the doyen of the Ikhwan al-Muslimun, had a very profound impact on the Muslim Arab youth coming of age since late 60s. Western writers in recent years have focused on him as one of the two most influential Muslim thinkers of this century, the other being Sayyid Maududi. Qutb's writings prior to 1951 are more of a 'moralist'. It was after he was introduced to Maududi's ideas, especially his emphasis on Islam being a complete way of life, and establishment of Allah's order on earth as every Muslim's primary responsibility that Qutb changed into a revolutionary. His two years sojourn (1948-1950) in the US opened his eyes to the malice of the western culture and non-Islamic ideologies.

After his return to Egypt he resigned his job in the Education directorate and devoted himself to the idea of bringing a total change in the political system. Ikhwan gained ideological vitality when Sayyid Qutb in his jail cell wrote a book in which he revised Hassan al-Banna Shahid's dream of establishing an Islamic state in Egypt after the nation was thoroughly Islamized. Sayyid Qutb recommended that a revolutionary vanguard should first establish an Islamic state and then, from above impose Islamization on Egyptian society that had deviated to Arab nationalistic ideologies.

His subsequent 11 years behind prison walls gave him an opportunity to confirm what Maududi's writing made him aware, and that is what convinced the secular Nasserites to condemn him to death on false accusations.

Other than Prophet Muhammad (s), the contemporary men who had great influence on me were my father, Imam Hassan al-Banna, and Shaheed Sayyid Qutb. The first two Islamic books that I studied as teenager were "Dirasat Islamiyya" (Studies in Islam, or Lessons in Islam) and Aladalah Aljittima'eyyah Fil-Islam (Social Justice in Islam) both by Sayyid Qutb. Although I have never met or seen Sayyid Qutb, I knew him (as most other Muslims involved with Islamic work) through his many books, like the two mentioned above, his great commentary on the Qur'an, Fithilal-el-Qur'an (in the Shades of the Qur'an), and other books.

Sayyid Qutb was born on 8 October 1906, in a village called "Musha" in the township of Qaha in the province of Assyout in Egypt. He entered the elementary and primary school of Musha in 1912 and finished his primary education in 1918. He dropped out of school for two years because of the revolution of 1919. His father was Haj Qutb, son of Ibrahi, and a well-known religious person in his village, and his mother was also a religious lady from a well-known family who cared about him and his two younger sisters, Hamida and Amina, and a younger brother, Muhammad. After completing his primary education in Musha, Sayyid Qutb moved to Cairo for further education where he lived with his uncle, Ahmad Hussain Osman. This was in 1920, when he was 14 years old. It should be noted that he memorized the Qur'an when he was about 10 years old in his village. He lost his father while he was in Cairo, so he convinced his mother to move with him to Cairo, where she died in 1940. After the death of his mother, he expressed his loneliness in several articles (Ummah, My Mother) published in the book, "Atatief Alarbaa" (The Four Lights), which his sisters, brother and he wrote.

In Cairo, he completed his high school education and enrolled in the teachers' college, Darul Oloom, in 1929. In 1939 he qualified as an Arabic-Language teacher and received a Bachelor of Arts degree then joined the ministry of education. Very soon (about six years), he left his ministry job as a teacher and devoted his time to freelance writing. A factor leading to his resignation from the teaching job was his disagreement with the ministry of education and many colleagues regarding his philosophy of education and his attitude towards the literary arts.

From 1939 to 1951, an obvious switch in his writing towards the Islamic ideology was noted. He wrote several articles on the artistic expression of the Qur'an, as well as two books titled "Expression of the Qur'an" and "Scenes from the Day of Judgement." In 1948, his book "Social Justice in Islam" was published. In it he made it clear that true social justice can only be realized in Islam. In November 1948, he went to the United States to study educational curricula. He spent two and one half years moving between Washington DC., and California, where he realized the materialistic attitude of the literary arts and its lack of spirituality. He interrupted his stay in the United States and returned to Egypt in August 1950. Sayyid Qutb resumed his job as a teacher and inspector in the ministry of education before he resigned in October 1952 (again because of his repeated philosophical disagreements with the minister of education and many of his colleagues).

The period from 1951 to 1965 included his joining the Ikhwan (The Muslim Brotherhood). His ideas were quite clear about the fallacy of many of the prevailing social and political/economic injustices and the need for Islamic reform, and he became the chief editor of the newspaper of Ikhwan. During his period, several of his books appeared on Islamic ideology and Islam as a complete way of life. He was arrested when the Ikhwan was accused of attempting to overthrow the government in 1954 and was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment with hard labor. He remained in Jarah prison near Cairo for about 10 years after which due to his health condition, he was released when the Iraqi President, Abdul Salam Arif, intervened.

In 1965 he published his famous book, Malleem Fittareek (Milestones), which led to his re-arrest with the accusation of conspiracy against the Egyptian President, Abdul Nasser. He was tried and rapidly sentenced to death based upon many excerpts of his book, Milestones. There was quite an international uproar and protest in various Muslim countries with appeals to President Abdul Nasser to pardon Sayyid Qutb. In spite of several demonstrations and many objections in various Muslim countries, Sayyid Qutb was executed by hanging on August 29, 1966. He left behind a total of 24 books, including several novels, several books on literary arts' critique, on the education of adults and children, and several religious books, including the 30 volume Commentary of the Qur'an.

Sayyid Qutb will always be remembered for his legacy of clearly defining the basic ideas of the Oneness and sovereignty of Allah, the clear distinction between pure faith and the association of partners with Allah (Shirk) overt and hidden, and the only hope for salvation of humanity. Sayyid Qutb was smiling when he was executed, showing his conviction of the beautiful life to come in paradise – a life he definitely and rightfully deserved.

Source : [Ahmed El-Kadi, MD](#)