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STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY OF THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT



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ABSTRACT :

According to a precise definition, social structure is an arrangement of persons in relationship institutionally defined and the principles and ideologies underlying such roles and activities.

The system so envisaged by an ideological system may be either 'open' or 'closed' encouraging induction or discouraging the same, it may either be egalitarian or hierarchical. The status and role may be either 'ascriptive or assigned' through achievements. A viable ideological system has prescriptions and taboos and leaves a wide scope for adjustments.

Muslim Social structure is based on belief in the oneness of Allah the supreme Power, symbolizing not only the unity and exchangeability of the laws of nature but also inherent equidistance from Him of all his human creations and equality of them all. By implications this envisages the existence of various bounded groups not hierarchically arranged, but horizontally segmented, not in conflict but competing with each other for a various life. There is however scope for segmentation horizontally and not otherwise.



Further, division of mankind into conflicting groups is foreclosed by the belief in the termination of prophet-hood after Muhammad. It also laid the basis for the emergence of mankind as one Umma. Status and role in the Muslim Society are to be assigned not on the basis of ascription but on achievement. A ruthlessly just social order and acquisition of knowledge beneficial to mankind are among the most important features of Muslim social structural organization.

KEY WORDS: *Social structure, Islamic concept, Ideology, Reality.*

INTRODUCTION :

Social structure has been defined as the “web of interacting social Forces from which has arisen the various models of observation and thought”¹. The study of social structure, according to Ginsberg, is “concerned with the principal forms of social organization i.e. the types of groups, association institutions and a complex of these which constitute societies”².

Generally the study of the social structure involves delineation of the arrangement of the institutions of society into a patterned whole. Its goal is to determine the principles according to which the systems within a systems keep each going in ways which are meaningful to the members of each society and in ways which are compatible with their values, motivations, beliefs and attitudes.

While the concept of social structure is given somewhat narrower and more precise definition in anthropology, as we find Radcliff-Brown defining it as “an arrangement of persons in relationship institutionally defined and regulated,”³ the concept of social organizations is referred to as an arrangement of activities or roles among the individuals and the principles and ideologies underlying such roles and activities. This obviously includes the belief systems and ideologies which have impact on determining roles, activities and interrelationships and provide guidance.

Thus, an ideological system in the present context may be conceived of as one that envisages a pattern of society based on prescribed form of interrelationship for its adherents. The ideological system to be viable and universal may set certain limits in the form of prescriptions and taboos, leaving a wide scope for adjustments and freedom of choice for individual groups and communities, accounting for variety within unity.

The structural ideas of a system may be slow to act particularly in situations where they come into contact with a pre-existing system that has gone deep into the habits of the society, leading to the persistence of those elements of the system which may not be in direct conflict with the ideology. This may result in the emergence of a variety of forms or models either transitional or somewhat of durable nature, depending upon whether the society concerned is relatively static or dynamic.

IDEOLOGICAL BASIS OF MUSLIM SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The ideological basis of the structure of Muslim society may be seen emanating from the belief in the oneness of Allah, the Supreme Power, symbolizing not only the unity of the laws of nature and their exchangeability but also inherent equidistance from him of all his human creations, rendering them basically equal among themselves. The proximity or distance from the supreme being is determined by the degree of individual achievement, which is always achievable and not by ascription or heredity. The concept of absolute oneness of God again sets at rest emergence of groups, glorifying their respective compartmentalized objects of worship. As a pre-requisite for an ordered society of the entire mankind, the creator and the sustainer of the universe has been conceived of as the only presiding deity, to be exclusively rallied round by all. No individual or group has the exclusive right to worship him, but all are expected to adore Him, individually and collectively in similar manner. By implication, this allows the existence of variously bounded groups not hierarchically arranged, but horizontally segmented, not in a state of conflict but competing with each other for a virtuous life leading to social progress and human welfare.

The society of the Islamic concept has scope for stratification based on identifiable segments of varied nature. The segments or divisions are however, horizontal and not vertical or hierarchic. The structural ideas of Islamic society assumes a co-federal character as in its wider sense it does not reject other systems nor does it exclude them form broader network of interrelationship. Another significant point relevant to the emergence of the structure of the society based on the Islamic concept is the

termination of prophet-hood. It is note worthy that the prophet of Allah, Muhammed was not only the messenger of Allah but the last one. It was with him that prophet-hood came to an end. This is of tremendous social implication to mankind. As is well known, a series of prophets and religious leaders have appeared and have had their followers. Groups consisting of the followers of these prophets have co-existed allowing the persistence of divisions through eternity. The termination of prophet-hood thus foreclosed not only further division of mankind into conflicting groups but also laid the basis for the emergence of human kind as one Umma and knitting the entire human society into a single society in the ideological sense, for all the time to come⁴.

The concept of society in Islam is based on the assumption of special responsibility on the part of its followers to establish a just order and no deviation from the principle of justice is tolerated. The Quran commands not to be partial towards oneself, towards ones parents and towards ones kinsfolk or community in the matter of delivering justice. No consideration or partiality is to be shown to the people irrespective of the level of society they belong to. There are Persistent warnings in the Quran against any tendency towards partiality.

IDEOLOGY AND REALITY

The ideological basis of the structure of society in Islam let us observe the interaction of the ideology with the pre-existing forms of social structure. Obviously the pre-existing forms were different in different areas where Islam entered and was embraced. In the tribal society of Arabia we observe the presence of such categories as Sarih or non-Sarih, slaves and non-slaves, mawali and indigenous and Moharjerin and Ansar. The Islamic ideology successfully bridged the gulf between these categories by opening up accessibility to all the roles for all the individuals and groups irrespective of the status they traditionally enjoyed. "No coercive measures were taken for the abolition of the institution of slavery 5." The Islamic ideology had a tremendous impact on its adherents to the extent that emancipation of slaves became conspicuously more frequent than ever before. The relationship between the master and the slave was transformed to the extent refused to be emancipated or freed and insisted on remaining with their master as members of the family, even kinship could be established with the slaves. This was obviously a more radical, effective and durable solution of the problem.

CONCLUSION:

As Islam spread far and wide, it drew its adherents from all the major races and from diverse languages and cultures. The people of varied background, spread over a wide area over the globe came to constitute the new ever expanding and ever receptive brotherhood. In some cases, the entire community or group entered the fold of Islam while in others only a segment or significant number of individuals

Accepted the new ideology and some others segments remained unaffected. The segments drawn into the Islamic fold sometimes continued their earlier relationships in varying degrees. The communities or groups entering into the fold of Islam came to uphold the structural implications of the new ideology on the one hand while on the other, the elements of their pre-existing culture that had the force of habit and tradition persisted. The dialogue between the two sets of values continued, one acting on the other. Thus, despite their membership of this new and radical ideology, the structural background of these diverse groups remained partly meaningful, though in a state of slow transformation.

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