

The Process of an Islamic Revolution

Dr. Israr Ahmad

(Rendered into English by Ghulam Rabbani Shah)

The Divinely ordained obligations of a Muslim can be understood as having three levels. The first obligation is to unconditionally obey the commandments of Almighty Allah (SWT) with an attitude of love and adoration (or *Ibadah*); the second obligation is to spread the message of Islam to every nook and corner of the world (or *Shahadah Al-Haq*), and the third is to strive for the establishment of the ascendancy of Islam (or *Iqamah Al-Deen*). These obligations are briefly described in the following paragraphs.

Our first obligation as a Muslim is to live a life of total obedience to Almighty Allah (SWT). This duty is described in the Holy Qur'an as *Ibadah*, which is often inaccurately translated as worship or prayers. However, the true meaning of the term *Ibadah* can only be understood if we combine surrender, obedience, and submission with love, adoration, and devotion. Total and unconditional compliance with all Divine injunctions is obviously required; at the same time, this compliance ought to be with a spirit of wholehearted devotion and love for the Creator.

Our second obligation as a Muslim is to preach and disseminate the word of Almighty Allah (SWT), the Holy Qur'an, and the teachings of the last of His Messengers, Prophet Muhammad (SAW), to the entire humanity. This involves calling people towards the light of Islam and *Iman*; enjoining and encouraging all that is good and just and moral, forbidding all that is evil and unjust and sinful; exhorting the common people, explaining the philosophy and wisdom of Islam to the educated and intelligent classes, debating with the stubborn and the rigid; testifying to the truthfulness of the Message with our behavior and conduct, our character and morals.

Our third obligation as Muslims is to try our utmost in establishing the Islamic System of Collective Justice — or the System of *Khilafah*, in other words — initially in our own homeland, in the country where we happen to be born, and then, ultimately, over the entire globe. There are numerous terms to describe this highest of all our duties: establishing the *Deen* of Allah (SWT), achieving the domination of Islam, creating on earth the kingdom of God, bringing about an Islamic Revolution; different phrases, same meaning.

All these obligations are deeply and intimately connected with and dependent upon one other. Total obedience to Allah (SWT) is not possible if one happens to live under an un-Islamic system. Under such conditions, a person's attitude of obedience to Almighty Allah (SWT) would have to be restricted within the sphere of personal piety, while His commandments are more likely to be disobeyed, though without intent or volition, in all matters of collective significance. Simultaneously, the obligation of disseminating the message of Islam to the whole humanity cannot be fulfilled, even up to a minimum standard, if there is no Islamic state in existence. Unless we succeed in creating a model of how the teachings of Islam work in reality, all our adulation and glorification of Islam would continue to be dismissed by the world as mere Utopian claims.

The highest of these obligations, and the supreme demand that our Creator makes from us, is to strive in His way with a view to establishing His de facto sovereignty on earth. This duty has been variously described in the Holy Qur'an as *Takbeer Al-Rabb* (to exalt the Lord), *Iqamah Al-Deen* (to establish the system of life based on the obedience to Allah), and *Izhar Deen Al-Haq* (to make the True *Deen* dominant). The same idea can be expressed by using a contemporary term — Islamic Revolution. Although the term *Islamic Revolution* is not derived from either the Qur'an or the *Sunnah*, we are nevertheless obliged to use this phrase as it effectively communicates the idea of establishing Islam as a complete system of life.

Under the influence of various revivalist movements, the realization is growing among the Muslims that the only solution to their problems, the only antidote to the evil remnants of colonialism, and the only way to freedom from the shackles of the "New World Order" is the establishment of the

politico-socio-economic system of Islam, sometimes known as the system of *Khilafah*. Indeed, there are a number of parties and groups working throughout the Muslim world with the aim of bringing about an Islamic Revolution, or establishing an ideal Islamic state. The crucial point at which most of them differ is the methodology of the struggle. Some have taken the path of electoral politics, others have restricted themselves to the domain of educational and missionary work, some have been engaged in armed or even terrorist activities. So far, however, no group or party has achieved any noteworthy success. The Iranian Revolution represents a possible exception, and will be discussed later on.

We firmly believe that the theoretical and the practical guidance for reforming and revitalizing the Muslim *Ummah*, and specifically the correct methodology for bringing about an Islamic Revolution, can only be derived from the *Seerah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and not from any other source. Imam Malik (RA) has said that the latter part of this community will not be reformed except by following the same process through which its initial part was reformed. This means that the goal of establishing the domination of Islam can be achieved only by following the methodology of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), keeping in view the present-day conditions, and for this we must study the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the manner of his struggle in detail.

Before proceeding with the main topic, let us discuss certain preliminary points. To begin with, we need to understand clearly the meaning of the term “Islamic Revolution.” The synonym for revolution in Arabic is *inqalab*, although the Arabs do not use this word in that context; they use another word, *thaura*, which has more to do with revolt and uprising. The word *inqalab*, however, is commonly used in Urdu to denote a revolution. It is derived from the root q-l-b, meaning *change*. The heart is called *qalb* in Arabic because it constantly changes its condition and its shape; it seems that at any given moment, the heart is either contracting or expanding, and that is why it has been called *qalb*. From this root comes the word *inqalab* which means *to get changed*. People often apply the word revolution or *inqalab* to all sorts of changes, whether great or small, momentous or insignificant. We hear about industrial revolution, scientific revolution, a revolution in information technology, a revolution in the business world, and so on. However,

It might look like a contradiction in terms to the modern secular mind when we speak about religion and revolution in the same breadth. Religion is commonly considered to be a private affair of the individual, which deals mainly with a set of metaphysical beliefs (or dogma), some rituals for worshipping one or more transcendent being(s), and a set of social customs and ceremonies to celebrate important life events, like birth, death, and marriage. Revolution, as defined in the preceding paragraph, deals with changing the political, social, and economic system which is dominant in a given country, and it is generally believed that none of these three spheres of collective life have any relevance to any religious teaching. So, how can we meaningfully talk about an “Islamic Revolution”?

The key is to comprehend the difference between a religion and a *Deen*, and to realize that Islam is not merely a religion but it is, in fact, the God-given *Deen*, i.e., a complete way of life, an all-embracing mode of existence. A religion may not have anything to do with the affairs of the market, the society, the parliament, and the court, but a *Deen* embraces *all* aspects of human life. We often use the two words — religion and *Deen* — as if they were synonyms, which most certainly they are not. Consider the religion called Christianity as it exists today. It is devoid of any laws: nothing is forbidden, nothing obligatory. It is simply a dogma plus a general moral teaching, the latter being the common heritage of the entire humanity rather than the possession of this or that religion. We can say that Christianity fits snugly in the narrow confines of the definition of a religion, and, as such, it can exist peacefully under a secular system simply because it lacks a set of politico-socio-economic teachings of its own. Christianity never threatens the existing secular system. This does not, however, apply to Islam.

It might be a surprise for the reader that the word *madhhab* (Arabic for religion) does not appear even once in the Holy Qur’an. My study of the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is rather limited, but I do not think that this word appeared in these traditions either, at least not in the sense in which it is used nowadays. The word *madhhab* came into vogue among the Muslims when it was used by the later generations to denote various schools of thought and their different opinions

regarding the details of the *Shari'ah*. These details of the Islamic Law were systematically and meticulously described by the jurists; the differences of opinion in interpreting these details led to the development of various schools of jurisprudence, and were subsequently called as *madhhab* (plural of *madhhab*); thus we talk about the *madhhab* of Imam Abu Hanifa, or the *madhhab* of Imam Shafa'e, or the Salafi *madhhab*, or the Zahiri *madhhab* and so on. All these are schools of jurisprudence within Islam; their variety is not competitive but supplementary.

Islam, on the other hand, is not a *madhhab* but a *Deen* — a complete code of life — covering all aspects of human existence. The elements which are commonly identified with religion are also present: Islam has its own well-defined creed, its own modes of worshipping Almighty Allah (SWT), and its own set of rituals and ceremonies to celebrate significant life events. But then Islam has its own set of family laws, its own concept of social evils which it wants to eradicate and its own concept of social values which it wants to promote. Islam has its own set of economic teachings, the goal of which is to establish an economic order characterized by egalitarianism and fairness. Although there is no detailed and specified political system in Islam, the fundamentals and guiding principles of a just political order are clearly spelled out in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and these were put into practice by the Rightly Guided Caliphs (RAA). Similarly, Islam has its own criminal law, its own civil law, and its own law of evidence. All this signifies that, much more than a mere religion in the narrow sense of the word, Islam is actually a total way of life which gives instructions regarding all dimensions of individual as well as collective human existence.

Let me quote here a sentence from *The Hundred*, a book dealing with hundred most influential personalities of human history. Its author, Dr. Michael H. Hart, has placed Prophet Muhammad (SAW) at the top of his list. Such a step was taken, not out of any love for the Prophet, but in obeisance to the indelible verdict of history. According to Dr. Hart: "My choice of Muhammad [SAW] to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was *supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels*." This quote opens up for us a window into the workings of the modern mind, a mind which has divided the human enterprise into two separate domains — the religious or spiritual and the secular or worldly — in contravention to the teachings of the Divine Revelation. The point I am trying to make here, however, is that Dr. Hart's knowledge and analysis of history led him to admit that there is only one man in the entire human history who was successful — *supremely successful* — in both of these domains of human existence. The Holy Prophet (SAW) gave a new set of beliefs and doctrines (new in the sense that they were unknown in that particular place and era), he taught the uniquely Islamic modes of worshipping Almighty Allah (SWT), he preached and practiced a Divinely inspired morality, he purified the souls of his Companions (RAA), he instructed and guided them concerning their moral and spiritual lives, and he cultivated a level of God-consciousness and piety that can only be described as extraordinary and unparalleled in the entire human history. At the same time, however, the Prophet (SAW) also organized his devotees in the form of a disciplined party, he challenged the system, beliefs, and the life-style dominant in the society, he gave the world a new politico-socio-economic order, he established a Muslim society in Madinah, he actually led the army of the believers against the infidels in battlefields, and finally established an Islamic state based on the principles which he preached and practiced as an individual.

Here, in the life and personality of the Holy Prophet (SAW), is a remarkable synthesis of the religious and the "mundane" that is not found in any other personage. One-sided and single-dimensional personalities we have enough: Socrates and Buddha and the Jesus of the Gospels on the one hand, and Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, and Alexander on the other. But "the only man supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels" is none other than our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

There is an Arabic saying that means: "A trait of character is truly real when it is appreciated by one's enemy." If even an adversary of Islam is forced to accept the glorious achievements of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), then this constitutes the ultimate testimony to the phenomenal accomplishments of the Prophet. I shall refer here to the words of H. G. Wells which he wrote in his *Concise History of the World*. They can be summarized like this: Although soul-stirring sermons for human equality, fraternity, and freedom were frequently said, including those by Jesus of Nazareth,

but it must be admitted that it was Muhammad (SAW) who, for the first time in human history, established a social order on the basis of these principles. Let me remind the reader here that the later editions of this book do not contain this sentence, as it has been expunged by some zealot editor. It would need some hard labor to try and find the old edition of Well's *Concise History of the World*; such a quotation is indeed worth preserving as some people have vainly tried to write off this statement.

The above quotes are meant to substantiate my assertion that the most comprehensive and the most profound revolution in the entire human history was the one brought about by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the 7th century Arabia. This is because, unlike the French or the Bolshevik revolutions, the change that took place under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) covered the entire gamut of human life; in this revolution we find that virtually everything — the creed, modes of worship, social customs and rituals, morality and ethics, social values, economic system, and political order — underwent total and radical transformation. This is the basis of our assertion that all revolutions in human history have been partial, and the only total revolution, in the true sense of the word, was the revolution brought about by Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

According to the definition of the word “Revolution”, as given in the beginning, there must be a fundamental and essential change in the social, economic, or political systems — preferably in all three of them — before we can be justified in using this word. The mere change in the creed or rituals of a given people, therefore, cannot be described as a revolution. The French Revolution of 1789 was a revolution because it resulted in the autocratic kingship being replaced by democracy; the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was a revolution because it led to capitalism being replaced by socialism. The conversion of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century C.E. from paganism to Christianity, however, was *not* a revolution because, in spite of the change in the beliefs and rituals of the people, the overall politico-socio-economic system remained unchanged. Thus, for example, even if the entire population of the U.S.A. embraces Islam and starts performing all the prescribed rituals and customs, but the system as a whole remains what it is now — secular-capitalistic-liberal-democratic — then this change, though profound, would not be described as an Islamic Revolution. When the state of collective affairs remains unchanged, only a cosmetic modification in the apparent form of religion does not deserve to be called a revolution, let alone an Islamic one.

The numerous secular revolutions of human history, though partial and imperfect in their extent, were nevertheless important events in one way or another. However, in spite of the tall claims made by their ideologues or leaders, these revolutions, in the ultimate analysis, failed to bring about any worthwhile improvement in the condition of mankind. On the contrary, the revolution spearheaded by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) stands out in the arena of human history as the most authentic and far-reaching change ever ushered in history. It was a revolution *par excellence*, incomparable to any other change.

Another remarkable feature of the revolution brought about by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is that the entire process was completed within a single human life-span. Starting from the propagation of a revolutionary ideology, the process passed through the stages of organization, training of the cadres, passive resistance, challenge, and armed conflict, culminating in the establishment of a state; all this happened within a brief period of twenty years and under the leadership of a single human being. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) started his mission in 610 C.E. and Islam was established as the sole dominant force in the Arabian peninsula by the year 630 C.E. The last two years of the Prophet's life were spent in initiating the expansion of the revolution outside Arabia, what is today called “export of revolution.” Note that there is no other example of the entire revolutionary process being completed in such a short period. Here a thoughtful reader must accede to the logical implication of these historical facts. Since this was the only revolution in the history of mankind that was achieved within a single human life-span, it follows that if we are to understand the revolutionary process and to define and describe the various stages and phases for bringing about a revolution, then we must turn for guidance to the life of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

(To be Continued)