

The Islamic and Western Perspectives on Civilization

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Introduction

In this age of communication and technology, it is argued by some scholars that there is a threat of the clash of civilizations whereas, some other scholars disagree with this and believe that this is simply a slogan and a myth. However, there are some Western scholars who consider the Islamic civilization as a problematic factor in their strategic and political perceptions. It is for them the source of terror, violence, and intolerance. Consequently, some Muslim scholars feel inferiority when they compare the present day Islamic civilization with that of the modern Western civilization. Hence, there is a need to comprehend the true nature and 'reality' of both the civilizations — Islamic and modern Western. For a full appreciation of the civilizations — the Islamic and modern Western- it is imperative for us first to look into some important and relevant dimensions of this issue that have been misunderstood and then explore the main characteristics of these civilizations. Therefore, in the first part of this paper an examination of prevailing misconceptions is made. The second part is followed by an exploration of the salient features of the Islamic and modern Western civilization. Both parts will present together the respective perspectives of the civilizations.

The Qur'ânic Path of Civilization

Before we proceed for a profound exploration, we should note that the opening chapter of the Qur'ân presents clearly two perspectives regarding the historical record of the development of civilizations. According to the Qur'ânic historical record, we are informed that there is only one perspective that leads mankind towards the path of civilization; a civilization that guarantees peace, security, and prosperity for all. Therefore, we are instructed to pray to God to show us that right path of

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civilization. O God “Guide us (unto) the straight path” that leads to peace, security, and prosperity and “not that” which leads us towards destruction and loss. [1:5-7]

After identifying the right path of civilization and of destruction we are left free to follow any one of them. But, it is said that the very right path is clearly distinguished from the wrong path and then it is declared:

There is no compulsion [for the acceptance or rejection of right path or] in *din*. Truth stands out clearly from Error: whoever rejects Evil and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy Handhold that never breaks.

And Allah hears and knows all things.

Allah is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depths of Darkness He will lead them forth into light. Of those who reject Faith the patrons are the Evil Ones: from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness. They will be Companions of the fire, to Dwell therein forever. [Al-Qur’ân 2: 256-57]

PART ONE

In this first part certain misconceptions pertaining to the modern Western civilization are clarified and some other important aspects related to the methods of development of civilizations are analyzed.

1] The Challenge of Modern Western Civilization:

There is a big misunderstanding all over the world. Many contemporary scholars both the Muslim and the Western think that the world of Islam has confronted the assault of an alien worldview and civilization i.e. the modern Western worldview and civilization which have challenged the very tenets of Islam. According to them it has destroyed the Islamic civilization in the Muslim world. As a result of this, the Muslim world’s culture and civilization both demonstrate today the deep impact of Western civilization. It is also claimed that the Muslim world has lost its Islamic orientation and direction due to the profound effects of the modern Western civilization¹.

2] Is the Modern Western Civilization Superior?

Quite contrary to this claim, there are some other scholars who do not agree with this claim and argue that no doubt, for decades the Muslim world has been subject to the pressures of a world civilization evidently superior in the accumulation and manipulation of material resources and power but it is hard to accept that civilization has posed any intellectual challenge to Islam or to the tenets of Islam. Because, according to them, at the intellectual level, the modern Western civilization has lost its superiority over Islam as it is today continuously losing much of its cohesiveness and confidence. The blind faith in the pseudo-religion of progress, in the adequacy of rationality as a means of cognition, in the supremacy of modern Western civilization as the apex of all human history—all this is fading as the realization is growing day by day that society and the individual in the contemporary world are confronted by apparently infinite and insoluble problems².

3] A False Assumption regarding Science and Technology:

At the very outset we need to understand that the modern Western world is victim of a number of assumptions. It was contended by the modern Western philosophers that through the development of science, technology and modern Western civilization, man would be able to enjoy an unprecedented opportunity of finding happiness on this earth. But ironically, this assumption does not prove to be true. Far from being truthful, it is now proving to be an illusion. One can see this illusion in the form of the crisis and chaos in the life of man and society of the modern world. Hence, one can rightly conclude that far from being threatened by any intellectual challenge from the modern Western civilization as typified by the modern Western world, Islam itself might be said to constitute a serious challenge to the declining standards and values, and the increasing confusion of the world. The philosophically fragmented and dichotomous West has little to offer to a religion whose strength lies in its unity of faith and life, thought and action.

4) Bertrand Russell's Remark:

It is also important for us to understand that many modern Western philosophers do not agree with all the assumptions held by the modern Western world. In the background of the false notion of the superiority of modern Western civilization and its crisis, for example, Bertrand Russell contemplated on this scenario of the modern world and suggested that people should not misunderstand that the only scientific and technological development and even the development of material resources are sufficient to guarantee the real development of a civilization. He warned and reminded us not to forget a fundamental truth that along with science and technology what we need for a comprehensive development is wisdom. He said:

[A] scientific civilization is a good civilization, it is necessary that increase in knowledge should be accompanied by increase in wisdom. I mean by wisdom a right conception of the ends of life. This is something which science itself does not provide. Increase of science by itself, therefore is not enough to guarantee any genuine progress, though it provides one of the ingredients which progress requires³.

5) True Nature of Modern Western Civilization is not Understood:

It is also important to note that the problem of superiority and inferiority is caused because the true nature of both the modern Western and Islamic civilizations is not understood properly. The Islamic civilization, though, is simple but due to some historical and intellectual factors, is beyond the grasps of most of the people. Therefore, they have developed a hotchpotch view of Islamic civilization. The modern Western civilization is a complex civilization. Therefore, Seyyed Hossein Nasr says that many people in the East, including Muslims are unable to understand the true nature of modern Western civilization precisely because they only look at its surface-aspects without paying attention to the philosophical ideas which underlie that civilization⁴. It is, therefore, very important for those who wish to know the modern Western civilization to realize the epistemological significance of the philosophical ideas which have come into being during the modern period; "ideas which are not derived from a sacred source. Rather, modern philosophies are

usually born of the attempts of individual philosophers who seek, through the use of reason or empirical data, to create an all encompassing system of thought which is then soon faced with the criticism by another philosopher who destroys the older mental construct to replace it with another⁵. This philosophical system of thought is the basis of the modern Western worldview and civilization. Hence, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr what is important and absolutely essential at this particular juncture of human history is a critical understanding and study of the philosophical ideas and history of Western thought from the Islamic point of view⁶.

6] The Nature of Philosophical Inquiry:

It is, therefore, necessary to understand the true nature of philosophical inquiry. The purpose of philosophical inquiry throughout human history has been to discover the reality underlying the physical phenomena. This inquiry develops the metaphysical understanding of the universe including man and his origin. In order to know the true nature of metaphysical reality, all philosophers depend on philosophical inquiry. It is argued that the philosophical inquiry generally depends on the method of rationality and logic. Both, the soundness of their inquiry and the result, totally depend on the soundness of the method of philosophical inquiry that is adopted. If the method is sound, so would the conclusion be; and vice versa.

7] The Limitations of Methods of Philosophical Inquiry:

However, the methods, adopted by different groups such as philosophers, thinkers or scientists throughout human history for developing metaphysics — do not depend on logic and rationality as claimed by them. Rather, they depend on superstition, mediation, conjecture or speculation but they call these means as rational, logical or empirical methods. They have no other way except to depend on these conjectural sources so far as the metaphysical inquiry is concerned. In fact, in reality, the superstitions, mediation, imagination even so-called rationalism and empiricism all are helpless to give exact or truthful conclusion about metaphysical reality simply because metaphysical truth is beyond the reach of all these means and methods. The metaphysical

conclusions drawn based on these sources do not prove to be truthful as they claimed to solve the problems of human life on the basis of their metaphysical understanding but practically they failed to solve those problems. Huntington is, therefore, forced, as he sees that the present day human realities are full of problems, to declare that the present day dominant civilization could not stop the total destruction of mankind. He concluded: "On a worldwide basis Civilization seems in many respects to be yielding to barbarism, generating the image of an unprecedented phenomenon, a global Dark Ages possibly descending on humanity"⁷.

8] The Islamic Civilization is based on Knowledge:

The case of Islamic civilization is totally different. No doubt today it is not dominant and is in the state of crisis. But the reason for this crisis is different from that of modern Western civilization. The Islamic civilization, however, is not based on philosophical ideas or system of thought. The metaphysical understanding of Islam is not the result of human inquiry—philosophical or scientific. The Qur'ân considers the modern Western type of philosophical inquiry essentially fallacious simply because it is based on conjecture and imagination. The Qur'ân tells us that the real cause of present day malady of mankind is the guesswork and conjecture adopted by the philosophers in their pursuit of reality. Sayyid Mawdudi Says: "In sharp contrast to these fallacious methods, the Qur'ân lays down an altogether different method to guide men in their quest of reality. This method requires, first of all, that one should heed with open ears and consider with open mind the statements of those who [i.e. the Prophets of God] claim to be expounding their doctrine about metaphysical reality not on the basis of speculation or conjecture, nor on the basis of mediation or intuitive conviction, but on the basis of the 'knowledge of sacred source'. They should then proceed to consider the physical phenomena which form a part of man's observation or experience of the universe; to systematize all that they come to know in this manner and to seriously reflect whether the phenomena seem to testify to the reality underlying the phenomena to which these people have drawn their attention. If one finds sufficient grounds to affirm the truth propounded by the Prophets, why on earth should anyone contradict such truths?"⁸ This

very method is the basis of the philosophical inquiry according to Islam. The Qur'ân does urge people and train them, over and over again, to follow this method. It draws frequently the attention of the reader towards the physical phenomena and then asks to draw the right conclusion from it.

9] Metaphysical Reality According to the Qur'ân: Allah is the Creator of the Universe:

The Qur'ân claims that this world is created by God and the physical phenomena of night and day is an empirical proof of it. The alternation of day and night is the outcome of an absolutely precise and well-regulated movement of the earth around the sun. This is an incontrovertible sign of the existence of an all-encompassing controller, of an all-powerful God Whose dominion embraces the whole universe. This alternation of day and night is also indicative of the infinite wisdom and purposiveness of the Creator since a lot of creatures of the earth depend upon it. This alternation is also indicative of the Providence, Mercy and Lordship of the Creator since it is evident that He Who has created all beings on earth has also made arrangements to cater to all their requirements⁹.

What this unmistakably proves is that the Creator is the One Who fully controls the entire universe and that far from being arbitrary and capricious, He is Wise. His actions also go to show that in view of His benevolence and alternation of day and night clearly reveals that anything which is subject to the system of alternation of night and day is a servant and not the Lord. Therefore, the Lord must be accepted and obeyed. The Lord gives guidance and rules for the development of civilization. Hence, God, His guidance and rules should be the basis of all civilizational activities. The belief in One God is the source of the Islamic civilization that has come from God to mankind, and gives them a particular concept of the universe, of life of human history, and of values and purpose, and defines for mankind a way of life. For example, in an Islamic civilization, the most honorable is the one who is noblest in character. The Islamic civilization places the highest value on humanity of man and honors the noble human characteristics as truly civilized¹⁰.

10] The Origin and Development of Civilization:

According to the Social Contract Theories of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau the civilization originated because of the needs of 'natural beings'. People were living in the state of nature as 'natural beings'. From this state of nature 'natural beings' first evolved into 'social beings', and then moved to civilization. Rousseau asserted that man as a natural being was blessed with sufficient food and natural shelters by the natural environment. Over a period of many years, the primitive needs of men developed into a new but dynamic situation called human *needs* and *wants*. As social needs developed, more permanent relationships were desired, and families were formed. Eventually, Rousseau argues, social beings moved into the sweetest sentiments of civil society. In this way the purpose of society was determined. It is to help promote the good of the community and of every individual who comprises it. Finally, as humanity developed, people became 'civilized beings' and needed moral freedom in order to lead a fully human civilized life¹¹. Later on August Comte advanced another theory of Law of Three stages of human society. According to this theory, civilizational developmental process went through three stages. The first stage was the stage of superstition and religious dogmas. In this stage civilization was still in its infancy. It did not achieve remarkable achievements in terms of development of civilization. Then mankind entered into another period of philosophical enlightenment. In this period of philosophical ideas humanity reached to a civilization that could serve the fundamental needs of a civil society. Plato and Aristotle had already provided an intellectual framework for this civil society, state, and government. However, it did not prove that that civilization can achieve tremendous scientific and technological advancement. As a result of this realization, humanity started arguing that neither religious perspective nor philosophical outlook is sufficient to guarantee fastest development in terms of eradication of diseases and misery. Unless we understand the true nature of man and society on the basis of a new method of new spirit of inquiry we cannot march towards more authentic civilizational development. It was, therefore, argued that a rigorous method of observation and experiment

would enable mankind to understand each and everything of this world. The application of scientific method of observation and experiment finally opened the box of Pandora. Humanity with the development of science and technology became capable to introduce a better civilization—scientific and technological civilization¹².

11] *Din* is the Basis of Civilization:

However, the Islamic perspective of origin and development of civilization is different. It does not endorse the theory of development of civilization based on material or human needs or the Law of Three stages of human development. Civilization, according to the Islamic perspective did not originate out of the context of its worldview. Its origin and development is etymologically linked to its fundamental concept i.e. Islam which is the *din* [way of life and code of conduct]. Islam is not a religion in the modern Western sense. Rather it is *din* [the way of life]. When we speak of Islam and refer to it by the Arabic term *din* [DYN] it refers to many connotations that all are conceptually interconnected to one another. Naquib al-Attas argues that the primary significations of the term *din* can be reduced to four: indebtedness, submissiveness, judicious power and natural inclination or tendency. He says if we look into only one connotation 'indebtedness' we will realize that the civilization is developed only on the basis of *din*. According to this connotation, a follower of *din* is under obligation to yield and obey law and ordinances governing debts. It implies that there is an organized society involved in commercial life in towns and cities. A town or city is one which has a judge, ruler or governor with a civilized living; of societal life of law and order and justice and authority. This condition of society denotes the meaning of *maddana* [city] and its process refers to *tamaddun*, meaning civilization¹³. Islam as *din* stands for development of civilization that can be only achieved when *din* is practiced in its totality. Practice of *din* demands complete submission to its teachings. Islam as *din* provides the worldview, the guidance, the divine values and the Sharī'ah- rules and principles. Some of the important principles of the Sharī'ah are the principle of propagation of virtues and abstaining from vices and the

principle of *ijtihad* –the utmost intellectual exercise for the cause of Islam and the welfare of society. All these are the prerequisites of a civilization.

But unfortunately, this is the dimension which is missing totally in the modern Western civilization. The modern Western civilization that encompasses the sensualist and empirical epistemology, has dominated the horizon of the Western world in the modern period. In the modern Western worldview and civilization Reality has been reduced only to the world of experience by the external senses alone. The existence of God, *din* and all spiritual realms of being have been reduced to the level of abstract ideas and finally to the unreal. God as Ultimate Reality and the source of knowledge is replaced by humanism, rationalism, empiricism, realism, and pragmatism. As a result of this, cut off from God, all the civilizational activities are resulting in the form of barbarism and dark ages¹⁴.

12] Conjecture is the Basis of the Modern Western Worldview and Civilization:

As a result of the development of conjectural worldview everything has been given a new but false meaning and form as can be seen in the intellectual circles of the modern Western world. The best example of this kind of false understanding can be seen in the explanation of rationality and logic. Elaborating the false perception of rationality, Sayyid Mawdudi argues that with regard to the concept of rationalism it was forcefully asserted by the Western scholars that during the period of Renaissance the modern Western science and civilization were developed based entirely on rationalism and empiricism. He says: “Although a deeper critical study of the modern Western civilization shows, beyond doubt, that it is neither based on rationalism nor empiricism. On the contrary, its entire structure stands on feelings, imaginations, lust, and urges. The Western Renaissance was nothing but a revolt against reason and nature. Discarding logic and reason, it turned towards whims and feelings, guesswork and material urges. It relied on moods instead of reason, and rejected rational guidance, logical reasoning and innate intuition. After rejecting reason and nature’s guidance, it preferred to be guided by desires and urges. It regarded everything as baseless which was

not measured and weighed, and condemned everything as negligible and worthless which did not produce any perceptible material gain"¹⁵.

He further adds

“ In the beginning even the Western scholars were unaware of this fact. Hence, despite going against reason and nature, they remained under the illusion that the new era of Enlightenment, ushered by them, is based on rationalism and empiricism. Later the truth dawned on them, but they had not the courage to confess it. Hypocrisy, materialism, and submission to the urges of body and instincts were given the cover of rationalism and naturalism. Irrationality and violation of nature is so much obvious that it cannot be concealed under any cover now. Hence, there is an open revolt against reason and nature. The banner of revolt has been raised. Everywhere here, right from the sacred precincts of learning and thought to social, economic and political fields, this revolt can be noted. All the leading personalities of the modern world confess that urges, desires, and needs now rule modern Western civilization¹⁶. Hobbes and Locke pleaded that “People are motivated largely by selfish desires, often to acquire things. They are interested primarily in satisfying their desires, in fulfilling the needs that their self-interest dictates. Human rationality, furthermore, was conceived in narrow, instrumental, means-ends terms; people are dominated by their own selfish interests [the ends], and reason serves the function of instructing them how to secure those desires most efficiently [the means]¹⁷.

In the same way, if we look into the meaning and definition of civilization in the modern Western world, we find different meaning and definitions of it void of reason. It is generally understood that civilization means the collective efforts and outcome of a community in the realms of knowledge, science, arts, literature, technology, industrial development, urbanization, socialization, modernization etc. Huntington presented a host of definitions of civilization¹⁸. He quoted Dawson according to whom a civilization is the product of a particular original process of cultural creativity of a particular community. Huntington asserted that civilizations have no clear-cut boundaries and no precise beginnings and endings. People can and do redefine their identities and, as a result, the composition and shapes of civilizations change over time. Some other

scholars define civilization as a collective system which helps man in increasing his cultural production. For these people civilization is composed of four fundamental elements: economic means, political system, moral principles and the pursuits of sciences and arts. Some other scholars argue that for the continuity and development of a civilization there are certain geographical, economic and psychological factors, such as faith, language, education and training. However, the dominant notion of civilization focused much on the material dimension of civilizational manifestations such as modernization and economic development. But it is now even being realized by such scholars such as Huntington. His realistic observation deserves our attention. He writes at the end of his well received book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*:

.....Modernization has generally enhanced the material level of Civilization throughout the World. But has it also enhanced the moral and cultural dimensions of Civilization? In some respects this appears to be the case. Slavery, torture, vicious abuse of individuals, have become less and less acceptable in the contemporary world. Is this, however, simply the result of the impact of Western civilization on other cultures and hence will a moral reversion occur as Western power declines? Much evidence exists in the 1990s for the relevance of the "sheer chaos" paradigm of world affairs:

a global breakdown of law and order, failed states and increasing anarchy in many parts of the world, a global crime wave, transnational mafias and drug cartels, increasing drug addiction in many societies, a general weakening of the family, a decline in trust and social solidarity in many countries, ethnic, religious, and civilizational violence and rule by the gun prevalent in much of world. In city after city....crime seems to be soaring and basic elements of Civilization fading away. People speak of a global crisis in governance.

The rise of transnational corporations producing economic goods is increasingly matched by the rise of transnational criminal mafias, drug cartels, and terrorist gangs violently assaulting Civilization. Law and order is the first prerequisite of Civilization and in much of the world.....it

appears to be evaporating, while also under serious assault in China, Japan, and the West. On a worldwide basis Civilization seems in many respects to be yielding to barbarism, generating the image of an unprecedented phenomenon, a global Dark Ages, possibly descending on humanity¹⁹.

All these observations of Huntington clearly shows that only material manifestation of civilizational development does not constitute the civilization itself. Civilization includes more than any thing the right kind of conception of man and life. It is man who develops civilization. Can we hope civilizational development from a man of material interests and sexual desires as outlined by the doctors of modernity? We, therefore, need a through examination of ingredients of a civilization.

13| The Foundational Ingredients of Civilization:

This discussion about meaning and definition of civilization sheds the light not on the essence and foundation of a civilization but rather on the manifestations of a civilization. The manifestations themselves do not constitute the actual civilization. Civilization in reality is composed of certain ingredients related to the worldview. When modern Western writers refer to the collectivity of a community in the area of arts, science, technology etc. as civilization, they, in fact, refer to the manifestations of civilization not to the civilization as such. They in reality refer to the fruits of a civilization²⁰. For understanding the true meaning and purpose of a civilization, we need to go to the roots of a civilization. For this purpose, what is more important is to raise a few important questions related to the fundamental ingredients of a civilization. The first most important question is: What is the view of human life in a particular civilization? What is the place of human being in the scheme of creation of universe? What is the nature of the relationship between man and the universe? All these questions are related to the question of worldview. The meaning, purpose, and even civilizational achievements all depend on the correctness of the worldview. A right and true worldview develops a right kind of civilization and a false worldview will lead towards the false civilization. The second important question in this regard is the issue of the mission of human life. What is the purpose of creation of man and

society? The collective efforts and outcome of a community in the realms of knowledge, science, arts, literature, technology, industrial development, urbanization, socialization, modernization etc. are not by themselves the final destinations. Rather, all these are the means to achieve some other noble goals? The third question in this respect is the question of the kind of belief system that helps to develop a particular kind of being. How for this belief system is effective to influence the life style of man and his society. The fourth important dimension related to this discussion on the ingredients of civilization is the question of the nature of man. What kind of personality is required - spiritually oriented or materially? What is the mentality of this man? What kind of thinking and thought is developed by this man? What are the motives behind all the efforts of man? The fifth question that needs our attention in this discourse is the question of connection between man and man. What is the place and role of man in his family and society? How does he behave with his neighbours? What is the nature of his relationship with the followers of other civilization other than his own civilization? How does he deal with other creatures? For developing a right kind of concept of civilization one needs to address all the above mentioned questions²¹.

In the light of the above discussion we can conclude that a civilization is developed on the basis of five important ingredients: the view of life in this world, the mission of life, the belief system, the nature of man, and the collective system of life. We find that in the modern Western thought and in the contemporary Islamic revivalist thought there are sharp differences on these five important issues. Below only one ingredient that is the view of life is elaborated.

[A] The Modern Western View of life

It is contended by the modern Western philosophers that during the pre-modern period the emphasis was on community, tradition, authority, hierarchy, cooperation, and government by the natural elite. In contrast, the modern Western philosophy emphasizes the importance of the individual, reason, liberty, equality, competition, and government as a necessary evil. Man as an individual is a rational creature that means that he is capable to discover and learn the fundamental principles that govern

the material and moral universe and become, as an adult, self-directed²². Reason liberates individuals from any unquestioned authoritative traditions; it liberates them from being slaves to others. Reason enables man to determine and pursue self-defined ends. In modern Western philosophical thought man has assumed the very centre of the universe. Humanism as the core ideology of this concept generated so much hope for man. It was argued that being the centre of the universe he is master of his own destiny and of the universe and capable to control and conquer it. After replacing God from life a materialistic notion of life was developed. In the materialistic frame of life, there is nothing outside the realm of matter. In the final analysis, man himself is nothing but an organic part of matter, reducible to nature. Man's intellectual, moral and emotional aspects of life were fully explained in terms of, and reduced to, the movement of one or more material forces. He is subject to the general laws of nature. This natural man is the cornerstone of the modern Western civilization. He translates himself in several forms, the most important being 'economic man' and 'libidinal man'. The first is motivated by the profit incentives, the second by sexual desires. He is unaware of moral responsibility of a human being. His actions are determined by his profit and sexual motives. Interesting to note that in this sense, he is not the master of his own destiny, nor does he occupy the centre of the universe. He is living in a 'market world' that is regulated by the mechanical laws of supply and demand. In this 'market world' there is a struggle for survival and the survival is for the fittest. Certain experiments were also conducted [by Pavlov] on dogs, and results were applied on man. It was contended that men and dogs are equivalent according to those experiments: both of them are completely conditioned by their surroundings. Hence, man should realize through rationalization that he is bound to follow a 'value-free world'. These men of 'value-free world' are ready to change willingly values at a very short notice. These men live in an eternal 'here and now' world. Therefore, they have mastered the techniques and are capable of performing any act, ranging from building bridges and overpasses in large cities. They know no boundaries or limits; they impose their will on other, and know only of one absolute value, namely power. The first hero in modern Western philosophical thought, Prometheus is glorified for he

stole the fire i.e. the light of reason, the source of knowledge and power and gave it to man to conquer, control and dominate others²³.

In the beginning the world was viewed as a machine or an organism or a workshop; a place of production-consumption-pleasure and now it is simply a game or a collage. Men and women of modern Western civilization understand very well that they are moving voluntarily and happily from a workshop to a supermarket and hence to a one-dimensional tourist agency that promises them a one-dimensional earthly paradise. With the progress of science and technology, modern man has ceased to believe in magical powers, spirits and demons. In short, in the modern Western world, the presence of the sacred is completely eradicated from worldly daily life. The world has stripped of all meanings and goals. Man in modern life, all the day and night, is busy in the construction of a myriad of activities and instruments, hoping to achieve happiness and pleasure. However, people have never before experienced the kind of change they face today. In spite of such fundamental change, people feel that they are disoriented and confused²⁴.

[B] The Islamic View of Life:

According to the Islamic worldview, man is created by God from clay and then breathed into him His Spirit. He is created as the most noble creature in the scheme of the universe who possesses unique qualities of cognition and recognition of God as his Creator. He does not ascend from the apes. He descends from the world of the spirit. His spirit belongs to God and to Him it shall return. He is both '*abd* [servant] and *khalîfah* [vicegerent of God]. As an '*abd* [servant] he obeys God and performs '*ibâdah* [worship] but as *khalîfah* he is directly responsible for the maintenance and development of conditions of life on this earth. It is this fundamental responsibility of man that makes sure that the civilization is developed in society in the right direction. This is a spiritual and moral duty assigned to him by God. If in the society crisis and chaos increase he is directly responsible for that. Therefore, he is supposed to be vigilant and active agent of the civilizational development. This duty – civilizational development - of *khalîfah* is as obligatory as the duty of '*abd*. These two features together constitute the fundamental nature of man. As God's

vicegerent, man must be active. He is seen as a creature that possesses at once intelligence and will. He submits his will to the Will of God and realizes his own creative power and responsibility over worldly affairs. He also bears the responsibility to care for all other creatures. In Islam there is no freedom without responsibility and, in fact, there are no human rights without obligations. Man is, therefore, expected first to fulfill his obligations towards God and His creatures. The biggest obligation is to guarantee the development of civilization — peace, security, prosperity, and happiness in the life of mankind. This is the way he would be successful in the eyes of God here and in the hereafter²⁵.

PART TWO

Features of the Islamic and Modern Western Civilizations

1] Worldview: Divine and Human.

A superficial understanding of the Islamic and modern Western civilization may distort our perception. But after making a brief but the philosophical exploration of the foundations of both the civilizations we are now in a better position to identify the salient features of these civilizations. The Islamic worldview is divine whereas the modern Western worldview is human. The Islamic worldview is enlightened by both the lights—the light of human reason as well as the light of divine revelation. The modern Western worldview, which is solely the result of human speculation, is deprived of the light of revelation. It is claimed that most of the Western philosophers developed metaphysical understanding regarding the reality of this world. In spite of this claim, the reality is that neither the Greek nor the Roman philosophy is metaphysical. The Greek and Roman philosophers focused more on this world. They emphasized the need of maintaining law and order in the state. They were interested to establish state and maintain its administration. They invested all their intellectual energy in legislating law and developing institutions for the purpose of running of the state²⁶. The modern West is so influenced by these civilizations that when Christianity reached (to) Europe, it also took interest to develop Christianity into an institution. The Greek and Romans

paid attention always to the external aspects of life. . What was necessary for man and society in terms of material needs was emphasized. Romans believed in the state or nation as God. They worshiped nation and God. The most important principle in the life of Romans was to fulfill the material needs of human body and the enjoyment of the bodily pleasure. Roman thought was rational in which emphasis was on man and his material needs. Man was the centre of the universe. The same notion was adopted in modern humanism. All these principles and notions dominate the modern Western worldview and civilization²⁷.

2) Belief System:

The Islamic worldview provides a belief system and a set of spiritual obligations. No Islamic civilization can be established without recourse to these fundamental obligations. The bed rock of belief system and obligations is the belief in One God [*tawhid*] as All-Powerful and All-Wise. Belief in *tawhid* is central to Islamic civilization. All aspects of human life originate and end at this fundamental belief. It is the fountain head of Islamic civilization. Belief in *tawhid* makes individuals and society dynamic. This belief causes refinement of the system, sub-systems, culture and civilization. This belief demands from its followers in society justice to be established. Unjust and undeveloped society is transformed into just and developed society. The comprehensive development of individual and society is the most dearest objective of this belief system. For example, belief in the Hereafter directs the followers to fulfill one of the fundamental obligation i.e. paying the poor due [*zakat*]. The obligation of *zakat*, on one side fulfills the spiritual purpose and on the other side, it helps for the eradication of poverty and elevates the poor sections of the society²⁸. In the Western framework of civilization an individual is basically a selfish being who intelligently manipulates the resources for the sake of his own personal interest. As a result of this selfish tendency there exists always a state of conflicts of interests. In this conflict the powerful and the fittest always become successful. In absence of a genuine belief system and a mechanism of obligations in the modern Western worldview the modern Western civilization demonstrates different kinds of problems if not the problem of poverty. There exists a plethora of

problems in modern societies modeled on the modern Western concepts such as the problem of discrimination, breakdown of families, high rate of crimes, pollution etc in spite of the application of highly sophisticated infrastructures and employment of highly professional and skilled personnel. In the absence of belief system and obligations the emergence of civil society along with technological development, a chain of high rising buildings, and unparalleled record of excellent system of high ways, inflation is going high and high every day²⁹.

3] The Sharî'ah: The Guidance and the Code of Conduct.

The Islamic civilization is the only civilization which strictly follows the *Sharî'ah*. The *Sharî'ah* is not the Islamic law [*fiqh*] in a limited sense. It includes both the guidance and the law. It is, therefore, the concrete embodiment of the Will of God for man and society. The objectives of the Sharî'ah are multi-dimensional. The Sharî'ah guides the individuals and the community on the path of culture and civilization. It regulates the society and individuals and their code of conduct. The main objective is to develop the welfare-society and promote civilizational development. The dissemination of justice to each and every individual is at the heart of this civilization. It stands for the elimination of authority of man over man. It has no sanction for despotic or authoritative rule. It strongly advocates the notion of popular participation of individuals in the matters of state, government, and governance. Its application in the society guarantees peaceful development free from crisis and crimes. Quite contrary to this, all guidance and law in the modern Western civilization are provided by human being themselves. There is no binding of any divine law or code of conduct in modern Western civilization; they are subject to change and modification. The Sharî'ah follows the principle of permanence and change. The Sharî'ah as divine guiding principle remains permanent whereas the detail or interpretations of the Sharî'ah [the *fiqh*] by human being are subject to change and modification according to environment. In this notion of permanence and change lies the strength of the Sharî'ah and makes it relevant to all situations³⁰.

4] Values: Divine and Human.

The Islamic civilization puts its emphasis on divine values such as the value of faith, fear of God, shame, chastity, purity, morality, spirituality etc. whereas the modern Western worldview liberates men from all these divine values and gives authority to men to design pragmatically their own values on the basis of expediency or utility. The modern Western civilization follows a fundamental value that demands the acquisition of power by any means and for any purpose. This is the central value system in the modern Western civilization. This value-system of power denies the moral and ethical principles and creates a spirit of competition for material goods instead of creating the spirit of cooperation for virtues. The spirit of competition leads to the environment of conflicts—conflicts of personal material interests. A person who is more powerful in terms of political and economic power is good hence worthy of respect and honor. At the level of individual, the modern Western civilization does not give any importance to the value of faith or fear of God or shame and chastity. In the modern Western civilization at the level of society the values such as civil society, liberty, individualism, pragmatism are emphasized. Materialism, relativism, and utilitarianism are the basic pillars of the value-system of modern Western civilization. The Islamic civilization emphasizes on both the values—the divine and human. On the basis of spirituality and divine values, the Islamic civilization prepares people to be successful here and in the hereafter without sacrificing the values of a civil society. The belief in the hereafter is one of the cornerstones of the Islamic civilization³¹.

5] Human Being: Moral and Amoral.

According to the Islamic worldview man is a moral being inclined to moral and ethical behavior due to his *fitrah* [nature]. Hence, the Islamic civilization intends to develop morally sound human personalities who are ready to sacrifice their own needs for the sake of others. In society, politics and economic activities moral principles are acknowledged. An adulterer is not worthy of respect and honor in the society. Shame and chastity are the integral aspects of a moral personality. In modern Western civilization singing, dancing, exposure of semi-nude bodies, free mixing

of sexes, sex outside marriage or before marriage are all acceptable norms of life. The Islamic civilization gives fundamental importance to shame and chastity. No one is allowed to destroy the cultural atmosphere that helps to practice and maintain shame and chastity. The modern Western civilization, as it follows individualism and is committed for human rights, considers morality the individual matter. Hence, an individual is free in his personal and private life to follow any code of conduct. Every one is at liberty to move in whatever direction without knowing the final destination³².

6] Virtues and Vices:

The Islamic civilization follows a fundamental principle of *Amar bil Ma'ruf wa nahi anil Munkar* [the concept of divinely ordained right and wrong]. According to this notion, there are certain things which are acceptable and there are certain things totally prohibited. The Islamic civilization has its own criteria of right or wrong. In the modern Western civilization the right of determining the right or wrong is given to people. They have the right to change anything on the basis of the opinion of the majority of people. There is nothing permanently right or wrong. Every thing, idea and value is relative.

7] Ijtihad versus Rationalism and Empiricism-- Mechanism of Civilizational Development:

Ijtihad [one's utmost intellectual exercise guided by the Qur'ân and the Sunnah for the sake of seeking the pleasure of God by way of either creating something new or solving some complex legal or civil problems of society] is another important aspect of Islamic civilization. In the modern Western civilizational process, theories such as rationalism, empiricism, realism, pragmatism, utilitarianism, modernism, etc are applied. The development of civil society, modernization, socialization, urbanization, industrialization, democratization, transportation, communication, education, scientific advancement, technological development, economic growth, political development, cultural and aesthetic activities, entertainment activities, tourism industry, all are the result of the above mentioned theories and ideologies. People are free to

apply any framework of any modern ideologies. According to the Islamic perspective, the Islamic civilizational process is bound to work within the framework of the concept of *ijtihad*. Experts, ministers, policy-makers, administrators, civil servants, educationists all are under the obligation to workout their developmental planning with the spirit of *ijtihad*. No one can suggest and design any thing that contradicts the main spirit of Islam and the objectives of the Shari'ah. Hence, all those who enjoy the status of the administrators or policy-experts need to equip themselves with the qualifications of and the spirit of *ijtihad*. The cultivation of the qualification of *ijtihad* is indispensable; as the main objective of the Islamic civilization is to provide peaceful and prosperous life and help people to prepare themselves to be successful here and in the hereafter³³.

Why the Islamic Civilization is not Dominant?

If the Islamic civilization is based on divine knowledge and it stands for peace, security and prosperity, then why it is not dominant? The answer to this question lies in the ingredients of civilization. We have argued earlier that the mission in the life of a community is necessary for the cultivation of civilization. The decline of the Islamic civilization is mainly caused by the absence of a meaningful mission of the life of the Muslim Ummah. The Ummah as a whole lost the true understanding of the message and mission of Islam. For the last few centuries the followers of Islam had initially neglected the mission of Islam and finally forgotten it. They wrongly assumed that the main function of Islam is to purify the heart and soul of its believers. For this purpose, they thought, a system of belief and obligations is needed. Hence, it was believed that belief in true God and obedience to Him through performing the obligatory '*ibadat* [specific form of worships such as performing prayer and fasting during the month of Ramadan etc.] is the sole goal of Islamic life. It was also assumed that to be successful here and in the hereafter these two things are sufficient. In favor of this position, it was argued that man is created basically as '*abd* [servant] whose purpose of creation is to serve God [performing worship in a limited sense] by way of fulfilling obligatory '*ibadas*. In this way, the most of the believers committed two big mistakes. Firstly, they did not realize that Islam is not a religion in a

limited sense that asks only for worship rather it is the way of life and code of conduct and a message. Secondly, they also did not remember that other than *'abd* there is another position of man i.e. he is the vicegerent of God on earth. As vicegerent of God he is directly responsible for two duties — dissemination of the message of Islam to rest of the humanity and the mission of the development of civilization in this world according to the worldview of Islam. As a result of these misunderstandings, they confined the message of Islam only to Muslims and that too also for the sake of the purification of heart and soul and concentrated solely on *'ibadat* instead of carrying the mission of development of civilization. Consequently, all the creative energies of the Islamic Ummah were shelved. Instead of providing creative solutions to the problems of society and humanity, the Muslim intellectuals started thinking in terms of borrowing, learning from others and adopting, and assimilating useful elements of modern Western civilization. They forgot that in the life of a civilization these factors do not guarantee the supremacy of that civilization. A community that encourages its members for imitation and borrowing and learning from others remains always inferior. Whereas, a community that continues its march on the basis of creativity and innovation becomes dominant. It is the message and the mission that make the members of a community dynamic and creative. Unfortunately, the Muslims confined the message of Islam only to themselves and they did not think for the well-being of the humanity. Islam, the Qur'ân and even the Prophet Muhammad صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ, who was sent as a mercy for all mankind, were nationalized as Islam became, the religion of Muslims, the Qur'ân, the sacred book of Muslims, and the Prophet Muhammad صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ as the Prophet of Muslims.

The mission of Islamic Ummah is clearly outlined in the Qur'ân and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ. The mission of the Ummah is two fold. The first duty is to invite all men and women to the right way of life, to communicate to them God's true guidance so that they can lead a spiritual and moral life. God's guidance gives them those principles which, if followed, lead to man's success and happiness in this world and in the hereafter. These divine principles help man to develop a healthy and peaceful civilization free from crisis and chaos. The second

duty is to build up the civilization of Islam. In other words the life of the believers is not inward looking rather it is outward looking. It is the fundamental duty of the believers to make sure that all men and women are led to the right way of life. They have to work hard along with all their creative energies so that they can develop Islamic civilization free from crisis, chaos, crimes and destruction. Unfortunately, they ignored this mission of Islamic life. They did not realize that if they fail to fulfill this mission, they would fail to achieve the noble goal of civilizational development and finally, they would also fail to achieve the pleasure of God here and in the hereafter.

Due to the absence of the mission of Islam the cherished goal of civilizational development was not achieved. The Ummah as a whole not only ignored the mission of Islam rather it adopted the modern Western models of development and modernization with this false expectation that they would achieve civilizational development. However, the realities of the Muslim countries manifest that even after a passage of fifty years they are still dependent on the so-called developed West. Not only they are undeveloped but their position in international politics is also insignificant. Whereas, they were expected not only to achieve civilizational development rather they will save humanity by way of practicing the Islamic principles of civilizational development. But the rejection and denial of the mission of Islam has resulted in this unfortunate state of decline and subjugation. In today's world Muslims are portrayed as aggressors, destructive elements, terrorists, fanatic, fundamentalist, backward, and undeveloped. All this is tolerated by our present secular leadership. Secular regimes and rulers have become biggest obstacles towards the development of Islamic civilization. It was under the colonial rule that a number of institutions based on Western models were imposed upon Muslim communities as part of the 'civilizing mission' of the colonialists. As a part of the strategy of the rulers of the Western countries, first, the Muslim power was shattered into modern nation-states. We were told that we have been granted independence but in reality it was not independence rather a new policy of making Muslim communities more dependent on the Western powers. In these nation-states a new type of leadership was imposed. This leadership, no doubt, carries Muslim

names but is completely loyal to the Western imperialist rulers. The rulers, not the masses, of the Western countries who have caused all sorts of problems to the people of the east and the west due to their imperialist tendencies and personal political interests, continuously extend their support to the modernized and secularized leadership.

The new leadership of the Muslim countries is committed to secularization and modernization of Muslim societies on Western lines to please and get support of the rulers of the Western world. This new leadership is not a true representative of the Muslim masses; it came to power with the help of Western rulers. People in the east and in the west are misguided in the name of national interest. In fact, it is not the national interest but the interest of the rulers. As a result, the leaders try to develop values and concepts of the Western powers, as asserted by William Montgomery Watt: "They were Muslim rulers who wanted to modernize their countries, as well as personally to enjoy European comforts; and these Muslim rulers did not hesitate to get themselves and their countries involved as debtors in the world financial system or entangled in the web spun by Western spiders". They knew very well that this would eventually create great social upheavals in their countries, but they continued this because that was the main source of their grip on power. To consolidate their power, along with other strategies, they also used the secular educational system as the main source of further decline of Muslim societies and the Islamic civilization. Through the uncritical introduction of the modern Western secular educational system, Muslims were divided into traditionalists, modernists, liberals, and secularists and even westernized Muslims. In this way, they fulfill the interests of the rulers of the Western powers. Consequently, in many countries, leaders have almost lost the consent and support of the people for the legitimacy of their rule. For the sake of their own interests, Western rulers, who continued their imperialist tendencies, supported these unjust and illegitimate rulers and sacrificed democratic goals. In this way, the Western rulers have committed, and are still committing a crime against humanity and the price is being paid by the innocent masses of these Western countries that they are now unable to enjoy peace and security in their own homes. The Western major powers who claim to uphold and promote democracy and

democratization, support undemocratic rulers and deny the democratic rights of the people in the Muslim world. As a result of all this, a big gap developed between rulers and the masses in the Muslim world. Even today, many Muslim rulers do not represent the voice of the people and depend totally on the support of the Western powers.

If Muslims want to change this state of affairs, as envisioned by Islam, then there is no other way for them except to work hard, sincerely, wisely, and intelligently for the reconstruction of the Islamic civilization which would result in the establishment of peace, security, and prosperity for humanity.

Concluding Remarks:

As a conclusion we can say that the fundamental spirit of the Islamic civilization is spiritual and moral. It focuses on man as a moral and spiritual being. It works to guarantee peace, security, prosperity and happiness and leads mankind to the path of paradise in the hereafter as it is based on the sacred knowledge of God. Whereas, the modern Western civilization, being materialistic by nature as it is based on conjecture and speculation of metaphysical realities, focuses all its attention only on the material needs of man and considers the material achievements as the highest success and enjoyment of this world, the highest goal of life and tries to turn this world into a paradise. So far the modern Western civilization did not succeed to turn this world in to a paradise but it has definitely turned this world in to the world of bomb blasts, wars and weapon industries. It is now a big challenge to the upholders of the Islamic civilization to replace this dominant but barbaric civilization by a true human civilization.

The Qur'ân declares:

Indeed man is in loss. [103: 1] Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of the meed that the hands of men have earned, that Allah may give them a taste of some of their deeds in order that they may turn back from evil[barbaric civilization].

[30:41]

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