A Study of Islamic Perspective on Contemporary Civilizational Issues

CHAPTER — 1

Introduction
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1.1 Problem Definition

The term civilization, has been used by philosophers of history, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, literary critics, historians, economists, and archaeologists. The aim of the study is not to delineate the different stages and shades of meaning in the history of this term, it will simply offer a definition which would enable everyone to conduct the search along inter-civilizational dialogue.

The idea of civilization was first introduced by the French thinkers in the eighteenth century C.E. in order to distinguish between barbarism and a civilized society. Three main criteria were introduced then to distinguish between a culture (a primitive society) and a civilization (a civilized society); 1. settled vs. nomad, 2. urban vs. rural, 3. literate vs. illiterate. If this is the case, then a civilization cannot be defined conclusively because the French approach seems to concentrate on how to distinguish the civilized from the uncivilized, whereas a culture may be perfectly civilized without being a civilization. Therefore, present research needs a definition of civilization, which is broader in its scope. If one examines past civilizations one will see that it is externally hard to distinguish them from cultures except that they are much broader and include more than one culture; hence, a civilization is in fact ‘a universalized culture’. This means that a civilization is in the true sense a culture, which is no longer limited to its local and national confines. As
such it begins to include within its boundaries many sub-cultures, all of which are very much colored by the foundational culture that has become an all-embracing culture, namely a civilization. It is possible to find such a culture in the ultimate analysis of every true civilization. The present definition of a civilization enables the researcher to distinguish the following criteria for civilizations: universality; multi-culturality; having an official language that characterizes its literature, whether scientific or artistic. If a culture does not have these characteristics it cannot be called 'civilization'. It is clear that the most important aspect of a civilization is its universality; and in fact all other aspects can be reduced to this one. This definition of 'civilization' would allow everyone to think beyond the Gibbonistic paradigm of civilizational singularity or Huntingtonian clashism. The research definition of a civilization enables scholars to discern and recognize the possibility of an inter-civilizational dialogue, which would ultimately render the promise of sociology a viable and attainable dream.

West introduced the Western Civilization and obviously accepted it without moving to the second step. They introduced a study of civilization and in that context studied Muslim Civilization and Islam and closed the chapter with terming Islam as a problem. Now “Islam as a problem” is a subject for future generations of the West, whether they pronounced it as so or not, articulated it or not, that is not the question. The thing which needs to be stressed upon is to how can civilization be
harmonized and freed from all the “isms” without which “civilization” is incomplete nowadays.

Muslims since ages have been confronting with different problems. Each problem now is a new experience but at the same time paves way for the contemporary issue. Every topic upon which controversies arise is termed as an “issue” — whether decided or not decided. Existing order has always treated / termed Islam as a ‘problem’.

The time when last Prophet صلی الله علیه و سلم came, Arabs were full of ignorance. Simply speaking the West today, with its hegemonic attitude, so far as the values and doctrinal standards are concerned, as evaluated by many great scholars like Sayyid Qutb, Kalim Siddiqui and others, is qualitatively no different from jabiliyyah (ignorance; pre-Islamic Arabia) that prevailed at the time of the Prophet Muhammad صلی الله علیه و سلم. In that setting Islam came as the instrument of change, indeed of transformation.

Contemporary subject matters are large in number and it is difficult to solve them in a few sittings only. The contemporary ‘world order’ has been created by the West through some hundred years of imperialist rule and many wars, including two world wars among competing imperialists. This world order has been largely created at the expense of Islam. The world of Islam has been parceled into small nation-states. These nation-states have been awarded a dubious “independence” and a fraudulent ‘sovereignty’. In fact, these nation-states are neither Muslim nor ‘Islamic’; they and their rulers, as well as their political, social and economic
systems, are creation of imperialism and serve the purpose of the imperialist powers. These nation-states do not belong to the mainstream of Islamic history. They were a symbol of Muslim Civilizations’ defeat, decline and dismemberment. They are a product of Muslim humiliation and subservience. ‘Independence’ and ‘sovereign equality’ in the international system, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, infact mean permanent dependence. For Muslims ideologically entire world order as it exists today is unacceptable because of its doctrinal position and global injustice that the new world order perpetuates. It must be changed. This is how the present civilizational context is viewed by the contemporary Islamic scholars.

The impetus to reform lies in a pervasive and acute perception of decadence, dissolution, or some form of disjunction in the community and the catalyst to this awareness can be internal or external as in an imminent threat to its security or a challenge to the foundations of its identity and cohesion. The dynamics of reform in Islam fall into a general pattern, which is duly reflected in modern movements. Basically, two patterns of reform emerged, one instigated from the top down hailing back to the short-lived but resounding example of Umar Ibn Abdul Aziz1 (r. 717 to 720 C.E.), and the other, was societal: spawned by the ‘ulamā, the religious leaders of the community, the best elements of which have traditionally maintained their distance from the rulers, and were temperamentally and

1 Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz - Umayyad Caliph considered by some (mainly Sunnis) to be a fifth rightly guided caliph.
socially more disposed to identify with the ruled. Fourteenth century C.E. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 C.E.) reformist, mujtahid (who performs ījtihād), mujaddid (Renewer of the faith), and mujāhid (Soldier of Allah), and reformers of all centuries like Imam Hasan al-Bana, Imam Khomeini and many others are possibly the most notable example in this pattern. The ulamā (religious scholars) to be contrasted and not to be confused with the pro-establishment, status quoist ulamā have traditionally been the conscience of the community, its natural representatives, who were in a position to articulate its interests and speak up for its members’ rights, on the assumption that in Islam the interests of the community were identified with those of the faith, and its rights with a generalized conception of the Right, the Just, and the True. This assumption was further reinforced by the privileging of the ulamā in Islam as heirs to the prophets, and the understanding that reform, īslah (reform), was a shared legacy of the elect, thereby lending reform a cosmic regenerative function, and potentially vesting every reforming movement with stripes of the prophetic.

This is simply another attestation to the intrinsic social dimension that is the hallmark of all reformist initiatives in Islam, an observation that can only be properly grasped against a re-examination of a deep generic affinity between Islam and Reform which may be developed here. The seeds of all genuine reform movements are experienced as gradations of the realization of the Islamic movement in time, comprising among other elements like return and restoration, instances of resistance, revival, and
renewal, respectively, *jihad*, *ihya*, and *tajdid*. Even the second-hand and secondary concepts of *nahda* (renaissance) and *tanwir* (enlightenment) that are part of the modernist secular vernacular in the contemporary Muslim world lend themselves to assimilation and appropriation within the broader *tajdidi* idiom. The historical prototypes of Islamic reform which were replicated in different centers of the Muslim polity all proceeded within a basic continuity with the tradition. The threats to the community were always assimilable and assimilated within the tradition, and even in critical moments of breakdown in its formal structures / and the disintegration of its polity, the syntax of reform was conducted in an idiom that was culturally familiar to the community.

The Modern Reformist Movement in Islam goes back to the closing decades of the nineteenth century C.E. with its epicenters spanning the major capitals of the Ottoman Caliphate and beyond it, the Saharan and riverine nodes in Africa and the Indo-Persian and Malay worlds in Asia, altogether constituting one extended vibrant field of magnetic resonance. Heir to a proud heritage of internalized and cosmopolitan State and culture, and once the crown of world communities because of its ethical foundations, the *ummah* (community), now saw itself dethroned and ousted as it heaved its way through the labor pains of a new age of uncertainties and false starts. While, at about the same period, Europe had reached its pinnacle of power and glory, exerting strong gravitational pulls throughout much of the globe, whether through outright military, political, and economic domination or, more subtly and detrimentally,
through the seductive appeal of its model of civilization, the Muslim ummah had languished in its own weaknesses and complacencies and was caught unprepared for the challenges of the modern age. Vital reformist-currents slowly emerged as the natural defenses of a threatened immune system would, mixed reactions and responses to the traumatic dislocations experienced by the community in the course of an uneven civilizational encounter with the modern materialistic, secularized, dominant, militarily and powerful West.

There is no such organized body or legal entity with a constitution such as a company or a political party with a hierarchical structure which may be referred to as the ‘Islamic Movement’. Yet the Islamic movement exists and can be assumed to be functional and a behavioural system. It has membership, norms, values and goals. A system without structure or hierarchy is a diffuse system. It is also an open system. At its most general level, therefore, it is so diffuse and open that it would, for analytical purposes, be impossible to contain within a manageable framework. Neither is it possible, also from a practical analytical point of view, to define the Islamic movement by membership; to do so one would have to include every ‘Muslim’ as a member of the ‘system’ and the ‘system’ or ‘movement’ would then be the ummah as a whole. The ummah is obviously an entity, and ought to be a worldwide behavioural and operational system. The fact that the ummah no longer functions as a behavioural, operational system pursuing clearly defined goals, has given rise to the Islamic movement. Indeed, membership might well be one
possible way of identifying the Islamic movement. But membership itself presents many difficulties. Potentially the whole *ummah* is the Islamic movement and this Islamic movement in the transitory period stopped the galvanization. So Islamic movement takes the responsibility, *harakah*, and *ummah* can be galvanized. As *ummah* has the responsibility of institution and justice, i.e., *Amr bil Ma’ruf* (order right conduct).

The Islamic movement is a worldwide, open and diffuse system in which individual Muslims or Muslims organized in groups are consciously working towards the reconsolidation of the *ummah* into a behavioural, operational and a goal-seeking system.

The Islamic movement is the traditional instrument of change. It is not a political movement with a manifesto written by a committee or with an ideology strung together by a motley collection of philosophers, historians, dreamers and activists. The Islamic movement, as described by thinker, scholars, is the manifestation of the Divine Will. As such, the first complete Islamic movement was none other than the movement which was led by the Prophet Muhammad صلی الله علیه و سلم in the Arabian Peninsula more than 1400 years ago. The primary roots of the Islamic movement therefore, go back to the Prophet’s Movement, which fructified into the Islamic *ummah* in Madinah. The labyrinth of secondary roots is spread throughout Islamic history and deeply embedded in the political culture of the Muslims.

It is appropriate, therefore, to view the Islamic movement as an instrument of change. Change is endemic in the human condition. It is not
possible to prevent change. No ‘progress’ however defined, is possible without change. No society is exactly the same on any two days of its life. No relationship between individuals, or groups, or societies, or nations, is the same from moment to moment. Change takes place on an on-going basis. Change is a process of growth and development as well as a process of decline and fall. Concept of change in Islamic context and perspective has civilizational goals. It aims at personality building which is multidimensional both in material, moral and spiritual aspects. Change is essential to attain taqwa (consciousness of Allah) and tazkiyya (cleansing) to attain happiness and to attain knowledge. To set goals and to struggle to achieve them is to engage in bringing about change. Individuals, families, groups, communities, companies, cooperatives, nations — all engage in activities to bring about desirable change to prevent unacceptable change.

At the end of the 23 years of Muhammad’s mission and movement and the struggle of the Islamic movement, the Peninsula of Arabia had been transformed from the state of jahiliyyah, primitive savagery and ignorance, to ummah. To bring about the total transformation of an established order is in the very nature of Islam; this is the very purpose of Islam. Islam changes all existing relationships into a new set of relationships. Vertically relates with Allah, horizontally with masses, spiritually communions with Creator and working for social and oral upliftment of the fellow beings. But unlike ephemeral social change sought by other ideologies, which is often change for the sake of change, or for the benefit of a ‘class’ or imperialist power, Islam points a set of
constant values. All change takes place around a well-defined and generally known set of constant values. This set of constant values is the belief set and world views of Islam. These beliefs are the boundary conditions, the parameters, around which change is organized.

The point that has to be understood clearly is that the Islamic state and order and the Islamic movement are parts of the whole Universe; Islam is incomplete without Islamic order. In the sense that the struggle for the *umma* is at the very heart of the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, participation in the Islamic movement is a duty obligatory on every Muslim. Thus, while the Qur’ān and the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ are the constant values in Islam, the Islamic *umma* and the Islamic movement are the dynamic, growing, developing, changing, acting, reacting and retroacting variables where *umma* may be non-territorial / Islamic State. This unique combination of constant values and dynamic factors make Islam the most versatile and effective instrument of change.

Ideally the Islamic movement should be a behavioural *system* responding to inputs of *information* and changes in the *environment*. Because of its composition, the Islamic movement is an ultra-stable system which means that the entire Islamic movement can never be destroyed. No power on earth can destroy all of it. We can say that the sun never sets on the Islamic movement. The Islamic movement is not a unified ‘physical’ system in the sense that the biological system of a living organism is a system which can be destroyed by withdrawal of life supports, such as oxygen, food or other essential inputs like water. The Islamic movement is
not an 'operational' or 'functional system', which when its operation or function is completed, must either die or perpetrate itself through coercion and the use of power. The Islamic movement as a whole and all its subsystems have or should have one common characteristic; none of them exists for its own sake; the Islamic systems do not have their own selfish motives of survival, expansion, domination and growth; nor do Islamic systems pursue the selfish ends of persons or economically or politically motivated groups and classes or elites.

The movements and the men who founded them, the men who worked in them, the men who sacrificed their lives, wealth, money, indeed everything for these movements, are some of the most dedicated men that ever lived. Allah will no doubt reward them for all that they have done to keep the candle of Islam burning through the ‘dark ages’ of Islam.

Since Qur'ân and Sunnah are along with us, so we are bound to work within the shari'ah. They form a complete schedule for the one who tends to reform the modern imperialist society and change it into an Islamic ummah.

The present study by and large deals with contemporary civilizational issues in Islamic perspective. Well all issues arise due to lack of unity of Muslims and lack of leadership on the one hand and materialistic, widespread, Western Civilization and the external problems on the other hand. These are the root causes of the civilizational issues at the current juncture of history. In this background the founding fathers of the contemporary Islamic movement and great scholars and activists in the
Islamic world have presented the Islamic perspective on contemporary civilizational issues. They argue that Islam gives us no way to even think of reconciliation with Nationalism, Capitalism, Socialism and current (Western) model of Democracy and presents its own system and sub-systems for a Just World Order.

1.2 Relevance of the Study

The conditions in which the year 1423 of the Hijri has passed are, by and large, not of our making. In the last 300 years Muslims have not been in the driving seat of history. *Ummah* has not made history; Muslims have been victims of history. Not long ago Muslims were the chief architects of world history. Islamic *ummah* constituted the people who brought mankind out of the dark ages and civilized the world. Having lost control over the direction of human history, Islamic *ummah* was taken over by the alien, hostile, brash, uncouth, civilization of the West. So much so that all the social, political and economic systems Islamic *ummah* has today have been created during the years of Muslim World’s decline; the years of the dominance of the Western powers over the Muslim countries. The West has achieved the fragmentation of mankind into small pieces of land known as nation-States.

The Western system turned the course of history not only away from the direction it was taking before; it turned it right round in the opposite direction, in the direction of total *jahiliyyah*, characterized by multi-dimensional global injustice such as had existed before Islam. They
ensured that their way of industrial revolution and their high standards of living could be sustained and supported by the raw material, the cheap labour, and the surplus value transferred from Muslims to them. They left Muslim world to experience their own Reformation and Renaissance to ‘reform’ Islam, to ‘modernise’ Islam, to bring it ‘up to date’. And Muslim leaders have tried to do just that. Muslim ‘leaders’ patronized their own ‘ulama, giving fatwa (religious decree) in their favour. A great fraud is being perpetuated on the people in the name of Islam.

West also introduced the intellectual invasion of Muslim societies through the educational systems that they set up. The universities that they set up in Muslim countries are poor replicas of Western universities. These universities have introduced into Muslim societies what they call value-free science. This whole notion of value-free science is a depiction which is played upon Islamic ummah. Many of Muslims are victims of this notion of value-free science, knowledge and culture.

In this socio-civilizational context Islamic movement sprung up although did not achieve the major objectives that they set out to achieve. Yet their achievements have been considerable. Their responses to contemporary civilizational issues have been remarkable both in academics and socio-cultural aspects of life and ummah must not belittle them.

The pioneers and the great thinkers of the Islamic movement produced vast literature in response to the civilizational crisis and issues keeping up with the goals and objectives of their movements. The present study analyzes and recaptures major global responses.
The result of the imposition of the model of civilization leads to Muslims’ duality of roles in the systematic structures of the contemporary world. The basic facts would appear to be as follows, that ...  

➢ While Islam can solve all human problems, Muslims can solve none of their own problems;  
➢ While most Muslims have an emotional commitment to Islam, their operational commitment is to socio-economic and political structures in the framework of Western sponsored and hacked nationalist / capitalist / communist forms;  
➢ While Islam demands the total commitment of all resources, Muslims offer Islam only their ‘spare time’ and ‘small change’ or marginal resources;  
➢ While Islam demands that Muslims struggle to replace the existing civilizational forms with a just civilization of Islam, Muslims today are content with, indeed proud of, ‘careers’ and ‘profit maximisation’ in alien functional and value systems.

These facts are unpleasant and add up to grim realization — that the Islamic movement itself is little more than the conglomeration of Muslims’ own marginal resources of all types — human and material. A movement that attracts only marginal resources cannot hope to be more than marginally relevant. Looked at another way, Islamic ummah is opposed to itself! The bulk and the best of their own resources are committed against themselves!
Scholars at all times worked hard on and around the subject matter. But it seems the topic is so much complicated, sophisticated and delicate that with every dawn, it brings a new history and closes the page of the same at each dusk.

In little league baseball, in business, in the bedroom and everywhere else, there is a design to things. Islamic ummah's intention is to grasp the cultural roots of Islam in a correct manner. It is impossible to separate today of Islam from the previous of Islam, although of course, today of Islam must be to some extent more dynamic, conscious, aware, not just history taker or passive but actively involved in civilizational history making than the previous one.

The present study analyzes the claim that Islam and Muslims have entered a new phase of rapid change. Muslims realize major change in their societies as well as to play a significant role in world order. It is important that their drive for change in Muslim societies is directed by a profound understanding of the dynamics of change. The fact is that the states, organizations, cultures, movements, even civilizations that are most successful are those that can manage, direct, guide, influence, anticipate, manipulate and control the forces of change.

1.3 Review and Survey of Literature

Lot of work has been done around the topic and they have tried to define everything in their own style of understanding. Scholars from different origins have written on Islamic state, Islamic movement,
Reconstruction of the System, Religion and Development in the World, fundamentals of reform, principles of state and government in Islam and many other things.


Well intellectuals always declare that Islam is a complete system, without telling us what this system is, and without pointing out exactly
how we get rid of the people who are very blot on Muslim history today. These intellectuals, as expounded by some authorities such as Kalim Siddiqui, find their way into the media posing as champions of Islam. These are the very people who are the greatest obstacle to the establishment of Islam in its complete and total forms as an operational civilization, solving the problems of mankind, and leading mankind in the way of God.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

Islam demands that the world's physical resources are used to pursue the higher just civilizational goals set by Islam for all mankind. Muslims also need to generate new policy options, organizational structures and compatible behaviour patterns. The Seerah and the Sunnah must be used to generate new disciplines of problem-solving knowledge.

Since world order is disturbed by the intermingling of various faiths and beliefs which lead to civilizational clashes and gives place to dialogues and many other things. To be sure, we live in a fallen creation and our perception of the thing is wounded. Then there is the human will that is bent even against the reality that is perceived. Islamic movement contributed to the harmony of World civilizations and global justice.

The study deals with the description of civilization, Western Civilization, Islamic Civilization, stereotyping and the present civilizational issues such as new world order, unipolar world, concept of social good, human rights, development, globalization, clash/ dialogue of
civilizations, pluralism/cooperation, contribution, response have been studied in the perspective presented, delineated, expounded by the authorities in Islamic academics and movements in the contemporary world. The present study objectively analyzed these issues, delineated the diversity in these perspectives and the unity within this diversity. It is hoped that this study will help in creating better understanding and will be a bridge between the civilizational gulfs and dissensions.

1.5 Methodology / Technique

The methodology of the study was analytical, objective, investigative and systematic in nature. The present study relies on the direct, indirect, interpretable, interpreted, interviews, field reports, qualitative, quantitative analysis, area studies and particulars of the subject matter.

Articles from online periodicals and various websites have been used in the thesis. To make it easy for the reader the scholar has used a shorthand footnote, if a source was footnoted earlier, providing only the author's name, title of the book / "article" and the reference page number. The usage of op. cit., has been avoided with conformity with Modern Language Association (MLA) style sheet.

According to MLA style sheet to cite a document from a website, a specific methodology has been prescribed but however present research scholar to suit the convenience of this thesis has devised certain changes and deviated from those recommendations dropping the citation of date of
last edition and date of access, for instance. No doubt the complete information is not available for a web site but still we have a defined methodology of web citation, Author, “Title of the artiele”, Title of the Site, Editor, Date and / or Version Number, Name of Sponsoring Institution, Date of Access, <URL>. In the absence of the author(s), the title of the web page is cited.

When the website is cited more than once, subsequent the footnote(s) provide only the author’s name, “title of the article”. Where author name is not available then “title of the article”, Website title are stated.

Various personalities, historical events, organizations, ideologies, movements, agreements, pacts, accords, conferences have been repeatedly referred to in the thesis. At the end of the thesis before bibliography appendixes in the form of Persona — important details of personalities, Historical Events — brief idea and history of events, Organizations, Ideologies and Movements — brief organizationsl details, movements and ideologies are discussed, Agreements & Pacts — numerous aggrements, pacts, accords are discussed briefly; and Miscellanea have been added so that readers could feel at ease while going through the text. All appendixes are arranged alphabetically. For better understanding of the thesis it is recommended to go through those before actually reading the thesis.

Inspite of all the accomplishments I know that “Perfection belongs to Allah alone”. I know my limitations but I am also happy that I have made certain innovations especially in the presentation and the format. It
is simply a humble contribution to the academics and my view of research is that my research has to be in the service of humanity not merely “academic gymnastics” as my supervisor puts it. With the result I am coming closer to the society around and feeling the soreness within and the need to get rid of it.