
Challenges of Defining and Revitalizing/ Reawakening of Islamic Civilization in Contemporary Era

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Abstract:

Islamic Civilization is acknowledged for its distinguished characteristics in civilizational studies and it secures these unique dynamics due to its fundamental principles. Although it has been area of interest among the eminent intellects of the East and the West, but most often it is evaluated in the opposition to the Western Civilization under 'us versus them' framework. This approach must lead to selective perception of the 'Other'. Essentially, Islamic Civilization possess its own unpretentious aspects which are obtained from its foundations; Quran and Sunnah. With reference to modern era, there is an utmost need to rejuvenate Islamic Civilizational studies from its own standpoint without considering the Western 'Other' as Islamic Ummah is undergoing from crisis of distortion of knowledge and misleading inpetretation of tradition by both external and internal conflict narratives. So this era is calling for revitalization and reawakening of Islamic Civilization to make it in conformity with its basics. Thus it would be in a position to regain its glory and honor that it has lost. This paper aims to highlight, in comparative analytical approach, the need to evaluate Islamic Civilization according to its own principles set by Quran and Sunnah to reawaken Muslim Society.

Key Words: *Civilizational studies, Islamic Civilization, Reawakening, Muslim Society and ContemporaryEra*

Introduction:

Predominantly, one of the most challenging endeavors is to address the problems in its totality. Civilizational studies, indisputably, stand at the top ranks of these difficulties. Among world civilizations, study of Islamic Civilization is one the most significant and interesting research areas of the intellects of East and the West. Here, an attempt has been made to refresh the need to evaluate Islamic Civilization on its own axis.

Problem of Defining Islamic Civilization:

To begin with the study of Islamic civilization, its foundation and reawakening its features in contemporary era, the most significant question among writers on Islam is to define Islamic Civilization. In modern, postcolonial era, there are different frameworks to discuss civilizational studies.

One of these approaches is 'us versus them' framework. It represents conflict of narratives, an outcome of clash and confrontation of the civilizations. Images have been built keeping in view of the 'other'. Nathan C. Funk and Abdul Aziz Said (2004) have remarked that in this manner Islam and West have been defining their civilizations in opposition and conflict of the other. Both have images of themselves only in order to highlight their own glory, significance and autonomy. This leads to the idea of superior 'self' and inferior 'other' as it is based on selective observation in which negative encounters are kept in consideration and the positives images are not remembered. For instance, Western Christian societies have developed their identity in rivalry of the idea of Islamic Others named Saracen, Moorish, Turks or Muslims. East or Orient is defined to discover their own distinctive characteristics. West is defined when she came to know about East. Similarly, Muslims

of Middle East in particular and the beyond in general have viewed their own identity, with great support system of values, through competition with European Christian Others. Hence self-versus-other narrative has been promoted in civilizational studies (Funk & Said, 2004, pp. 4-5).

Likewise, Carl W. Ernst (2003), an eminent scholar of the contemporary era, is of the opinion that, since last two centuries, Islam has been studied in the context of confrontation between East and West. Image of Islam has been drawn without dialogue. Muslims are defined as uncivilized and non-western. Orientalist culture has been compared with Euro-American other. Muslims have also been discussing the Western other on the same pattern. Marxism, revolution, democracy, nationalism, human rights and globalization have been the significant areas of interest among Muslim intellectuals (Ernst, 2003, p. 208). He further argues that it was French Revolution which originated the words of 'terrorism' and 'fanaticism'. Most recent innovation of American postmodernism is 'fundamentalism'. Thus new terms are most often used for the humiliation of the 'Other'. He believes that these outcomes of colonialism would engage upcoming generations to great extent also (Ernst, 2003, p. 209).

On the slip side, another perspective in civilizational studies is represented with civilizational revitalization and renewal based on its own roots. SaimKayadibi (2012) signifies the emerging need to explore and refresh sense of self-consciousness and self-awareness about Islamic civilization among Muslims of recent decades. (Kayadibi, 2012, p. 490) Simply, this approach focuses that Islamic civilization should run on its own axis. In my way of thinking, it can be called *Islam fi-nafsihi* (اسلام فى نفسه) in other words. He adds that the only way forward is to refresh Islamic Civilizational roots, self-confidence and potential. But this revitalization is conditional to the elimination of mix-ups and misunderstandings, posed by dominant Western discourses or emerged within Muslims ranks about Islam. For instance, legitimacy of violence for gaining needs of Muslims is a defective judgement (Kayadibi, 2012, p. 290).

Moreover, as far as the question of relationship with other existing civilizations are concerned, God has created mankind, according to the Quran (49:13), with assortment so that these diverse groups would know each other mutually. This mutual understanding about each other would pave the way for some type of relationship which should be based on collective assistance and positive evolution, but not on the motives of extinguishing values and cultures of other civilizations. (Kayadibi, 2012, p. 489)

Consideration of these two prominent frameworks of civilizational studies leads to this belief that there is need to refresh fundamentals of Islamic Civilization in its true essence and spirit. In order to function accordingly, Muslims should re-own those traits which have been lost during encounters with Western thoughts as any civilization, which fails to hold its fundamentals and religious values, is ruined (Kayadibi, 2012, p. 497).

Foundations of Islamic Civilization:

Here comes the actual responsibility of Muslims to define Islamic Civilization as it has been originated. The problem of identity has involved the intellectuals for many decades to distinguish the fundamentals of Islam. What is Civilization and how Islamic Civilization has been emerged? These are basic questions to be addressed in this section.

Assessing the nature of Civilization

Predominantly, civilization is a complex phenomenon which is hard to define in an unsophisticated manner. It is defined, according to (Bin Abdullah, Bin Yusoff, & Bin Laki, 2007) as a process, which is called *madani* (مدنى) in Arabic, meant for development and advancement and it is usually referred to "actions and development that is achieved, especially worldly developments in areas such as culture, society, behavior, thinking, science, technology, arts and literature." (Bin Abdullah, Bin Yusoff, & Bin Laki, 2007, p. 255)

In addition, FachriAidulsyah (2020) elucidates its meaning with reference to the prominent Muslim historian and philosopher, IbnKhalidun (1332-1406) in whose opinion, civilization has the elements; a) social construction as well as political authority; b) means of livelihood and employments; c) scientific and technological advancements (Aidulsyah, 2020, p. 128). Another Muslim scholar from Iran, HabibollahBabaei (2016) clarifies that civilization is composed of numerous components. Firstly, it requires plurality and diversity of cultures, religions, nations and languages to achieve excellence. Secondly, it also demands a comprehensive unit that should consist of all aspects to form a distinctive identity of the civilization. Moreover, it is not a physical thing rather a soft impression which does not take place between nature and humans but its evaluation should be taken by human actions, not by technological advancements. This notion is best demonstrated by the Quranic word 'Ummah' for Muslim society on a large scale. Last but not the least, a civilization is based on its priority system of needs and values. (Babaei, 2016, pp. 20-22)

Islamic Civilization

However, outlining Islamic civilization in the context of complexity of civilizational formation poses a real challenge to the scholars. But Islam provides a considerable explanation of its essence and criterion for Islamic identity. The word Islam itself, according to distinguished Muslim scholar SeyyedHossein Nasr (2000), communicates its principal idea. This word derived from *salama* (سلم) in Arabic has two definite meanings, peace and surrender. So a Muslim is who surrenders himself to the Divine Will to attain peace. He further clarifies in these words: "The central idea of Islam is that on the basis of the use of intelligence, which discerns between the Absolute and the relative, one should come to surrender to the Will of the Absolute. This is the meaning of the term *Muslim* one who has accepted through free choice to conform his will to the Divine Will. In a particular sense Islam refers to the religion revealed through the Quran" (Nasr, 2000, p. 14) In this way, a Muslim is who has submitted himself to God and accepted standards raised by the religion of Islam. On the other hand, Islam (capitalized) refers to the whole system of religious principles which a Muslim follows through his individual act of submission and acceptance. (Hodgson, 1977, p. 72) Thus, the very word of Islam indicates about Quranic foundations of its structure.

Foundations of Islamic Civilization; Quran and Sunnah:

Islamic standards for a Muslim society are laid down in the sacred verses of Quran and practiced by Last Prophet (SAW). The Holy Quran presented a philosophy which was unique and multi-dimensional in all aspects and different from all other existing religions and philosophies of life. It added new dimensions where required and corrected the faults in the existing religions with reference to all other religions of the world including the Arab paganism. Moreover, this comprehensive Quran contains the whole system of life within its potential like a seed of a tree contains the potential of a tree. (Ansari, 1973, p. 259)

As far as the basic themes of the Holy Quran is concerned, it, divided into 114 Chapters, is a Divine discourse, a dialogue between God and humans, and covers all spheres of life. Men and Women are ranked on the highest possible place, that of vicegerent of God. The very first revelation emphasizes on the importance of knowledge. The word ilm is the second most used word in Quran after that of God. The humans are encouraged to use their mind on at least 300 occasions. The Quranic concepts of justice, balance, and compassion are the Muslim ideals. A life grounded on these is a well-adjusted one. The Islamic virtues are piety, courage, purity and generosity; and in his life the Prophet demonstrates them. (Ahmed, 2002, pp. 16-17)

Dr. Muhammad Fazl-ur-Rahman Ansari (1973) has outlined twenty-one aspects of a Muslim society for which he has also provided principles set by Quran. He illuminates all these basics in detail. These standards are equipped with references of Quran and consist of aspects of spirituality, nobility, family system, equality, fairness, balance, progressiveness, democracy, justice, mercy, discipline, learning, fraternity and productivity.

All these traits make Muslim society a “Total Welfare Society”. (Ansari, 1973, pp. 185-192) Thus he concludes the Quranic characteristics of Muslim society;

“the above twenty-one basic dimensions emerge in respect of the society which it is the mission of the Quran to establish, - a mission that was not only preached but realized unambiguously and concretely by the holy Prophet Muhammad (in whom God’s choicest Blessings abide!) in the Islamic society founded by him.” (Ansari, 1973, p. 193)

Since these principles were not set only for preaching, the Holy Prophet (SAW) presented the model Welfare State of Medina through implementation of all these standards. When in summer 622 A.D. the Holy Prophet left Makkah for Madina, this journey marked the major change in history of the world. This incident, known as hijrat or migration is the beginning of Islamic calendar. Moreover, this migration from dar-ul-harab, land of war to dar-ul-salam, land of peace is considered a significant move throughout Islamic history. Here in Madina, the Holy Prophet arrived as a ruler and laid the foundation of a state based on his community. But the first task which he performed as head of state was to provide and implement the Charter of Madina. This Magna carta provided rights and obligations to all citizens of the State, the Muslims and the Jews, with complete religious, socio-economic freedom. (Ahmed, 2002, pp. 19-20)

The structure of state of Medina is, as Dr. Ansari elaborates,

“the Government of God, through the Rule of Divine Law, by the Trustees of the Mission of Islam, who function on the basis of their election by persons of character and wisdom among Muslims and administer the state, within the limits prescribed by God, as Servants of the People, for the attainment by the people of their Comprehensive Welfare.” (Ansari, 1973, p. 193)

Above mentioned structure is the fundamental formation of Islamic society and state without considering the external forces or reactionary perspective to ‘Others’. Islam as it is revealed in Quran and elaborated by Sunnah should be revitalized in contemporary period in order to take leading position in the world.

Challenges of Islamic Culture and Islamic Identity

In addition, Islam is unique as a din in its structure as civilization. It is not just a religion or system of theology as it is the case of western religious history. Instead, it is also a means to establish a civilization (tamaddun, تمدن) supported with its value system (Aidulsyah, 2020, p. 129).

Predominantly, Islam has potential to absorb and integrate different aspects into union from former civilizations as well as from contemporary regional sphere. Islam as last message of God has been maintaining the regional and local characteristics on the one hand and amalgamating them into totality and uniformity for worldwide outlook. Islam has assimilated the features aligned with Islam’s ultimate standard of “*Shahadah, La ilaha illa’ Llah*”(Nasr, 2000, p. 24).

One of the major pursuits of modern era is to question the cultural aspects of Islamic civilization. This also helps to understand the quality of Islam; assimilation into unity and totality. Dealing with arts and culture in Islam, Quran provides the principles, structural composition, aims and methods to exercise to confirm with Islam. Hence the Islamic culture and arts can be termed as ‘Quranic Culture’ and ‘Quranic Arts’. This does not mean that Quran is index for specific aspects of culture and arts. Instead, this revelation provides guiding principles whole culture of Islamic civilization (Al-Faruqi, 2013, p. 1). Principally, Islamic arts are expression of positivity enriched in Principle of Tawheed, monotheism of Islam (Nasr, 2000, p. 3).

The notion of Islamic architecture is also product of Western colonialism when they defined themselves in contrast to the Muslim or Orient ‘other’ (Yassin & Utaberta, 2012, p. 59). In principle, the Islamic architecture

in not confined to set pattern or style influenced by the land conquered by the Muslims. But the commonality in all buildings of Muslims is its distinguished identity. So all buildings made by the Muslims to identify themselves fall into the concept of Islamic architecture (Yassin & Utaberta, 2012, p. 52). However, Muslims have been paying respect to the values of all local variables of architecture and craftsmanship if these are not contrary to the principles of Islamic religion (Yassin & Utaberta, 2012, p. 59).

However, the question of Islamic identity being member of Islamic Civilization should also be addressed. For identification as part of Islamic civilization, which of the two from Iman (Faith) and Islam (practice) can be set as most substantial criterion of Islamic identity of a Muslim? The balanced and less provocative line suggests two levels for Islamic Civilization. Firstly, the least level stands on the external aspects of Islam and on the basis of these jurisprudential measures (*Islam*), the Islamization of the civilization will be judged. On the other hand, the advanced level of Islamic civilization includes the firm internal faith (*Iman*) as well as external practical (Islam/ Shariah) aspects of Islam. It must be remembered that it is not looked-for in Islam to maintain only internal aspects of Islam while ignoring the external sphere as criterion for Islamic civilization (Babaei, 2016, p. 34).

Reawakening of Islamic civilization in Modern era:

Living in twentieth and twenty-first centuries opens new horizons of discovery and globalization for Muslims. In this situation, they have to refresh their own fundamentals and begin reawakening. Therefore, this era is rightly named as “the era of Islamic civilizational reawakening” (Kayadibi, 2012, p. 499).

The process of reawakening and revivalism in Islam is not a new phenomenon. In order to implement the Quranic principles, Muslim reformers used to devote their lives to reaffirm themselves to the faith as individuals and as an Ummah. This renewal occurs mainly due to the challenges and new manifestations of that time. It stands as distinctive characteristic of Islamic history to revitalize their submission to Allah. (Hodgson, 1977, p. 71) Thus, Islamic history has witnessed numerous personalities who are called ‘*Mujaddid*’ revivalists.

Before considering the standards for refreshing Islamic Civilization and renewal of Muslim society in contemporary era, misconceptions and misunderstandings posed by external or internal forces of Muslim society should be settled by contemporary Muslim intellects in the light of fundamentals of Islam.

One of the immediate problems faced by Muslims in particular is to respond on the difference between revivalism and terrorism. SeyyedHossein Nasr (2000) evaluates the criticism that Islam is the religion enforced by sword. He rejects this notion arguing that Islam has limited the scope of war through making legislation about motives, methodology and implantation of Jihad. On the contrary, West has left war with no consideration of principles. Moreover, deaths caused in Crusades were extremely low than those killings generated by modern secular world. Additionally, Islam as religion of totality and universal guidelines has addressed spiritual needs of man on the one hand and socio-political aspects on the other hand. But Christianity has manifestation for spiritual life only (Nasr, 2000, pp. 19-20). The conquest of Makkah provides unmatched example for humanity. After this conquest, the Prophet proclaimed a general pardon. Those who had mistreated, disgraced and injured him were excused. The conquest of Makkah caused less than 30 deaths. This decisive victory of Islam is the inexpensive in terms of human loss as compared to the great revolutions, French, Russian and Chinese in world history. (Ahmed, 2002, p. 23)

Furthermore, Islamic revivalism is indeed reaction to those evils which have turned Muslim societies weak and decline. History has witnessed the revivalism in the European, the Japanese and the Chinese societies so same phenomenon is undergoing in Muslim World for decades (Funk & Said, 2004, p. 18). The authors (Funk & Said, 2004) clarify the difference between revivalism and terrorism in these words:

“Islamic revivalism, a movement to renew the Muslim communities from within through public reaffirmation of Islamic values, and terrorism, the use of indiscriminant violence for political purposes. Whereas Islamic revivalism manifests a constructive concern with matters of social justice, political participation, and cultural authority – that is, the practical challenge of constructing an Islamic future. Terrorism channels feelings of crisis, besiegement, and despair into acts that are intrinsically destructive in character.” (Funk & Said, 2004, p. 18)

Another unavoidable apprehension behind the revitalization of Islamic civilization is misleading knowledge. Inaccuracy in the elucidation of knowledge has caused degradation of Muslims in contemporary world. There is no fault in the Quranic verses rather error occurs in the interpretation of the meanings of Quran. This crisis of distortion and faulty perceptions has left Muslims in decay which is a serious challenge for Muslim leadership (Aidulsyah, 2020, pp. 133-134).

Foremost among the factors required for revitalization of Islamic Civilization is renewal of tradition of knowledge. Quran emphasizes on the importance of knowledge as Allah grants distinction to those who seek knowledge (58:11). Moreover, “Only those fear Allah, from among his servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Mighty and Forgiving (35:28).” (Aidulsyah, 2020, p. 129) but this renewal of knowledge requires some fundamental principles to be followed. It must be remembered that the Sunnah and life of the Holy Prophet is the only source of guidance in the exploration and interpretation of the Holy Quran. All the broken connections must be filled according to the guidance of the Quran and the Sunnah. Islam must be interpreted in the guidance of fundamentals of Islam, Quran and Sunnah. Thus renewal of knowledge is the chief requirement to become leader of the world. This Islamization of knowledge will lead to rebuild the Muslim Ummah in the contemporary world (Al-Alwani, 2006, p. 7).

The reform of Islamic civilization requires that Muslims should examine themselves and identify deficiencies and susceptibility. The Muslims must realize that Islamization of knowledge is vital to resume our intellectual contributions toward shaping up the epistemological framework to generate civilization. Moreover, reform cannot take place in one aspect of human life in segregation from all others. So it is indispensable to frame an integrated Islamic plan to deal with the crisis. This scheme must focus its potentials on reforming Islamic thought (Al-Alwani, 2006, pp. 48-49)

While examining the potentials and obstacles in the revitalization of Islamic Civilization, the study of Allama Muhammad Iqbal’s philosophy can play a vital role to understand the pathway for this difficult task but not impossible. He recalled that one of the major issues which Muslims have faced during last five hundred years was that the religious thought has been practically stationary. Previously, western world used to receive motivation and inspiration from Muslim world. In order to regain that statues, Muslims should move towards purpose of the Quran and that is to stimulate in man the higher realization of his diverse relations with God and the universe (Iqbal, 1989, pp. 6-7).

Another decisive factor to renew identity of Islam is the use of technology to publicize Islamic values and teachings. Print media has been a promising factor in delivering copies of sacred revelation and religious writings to exceptional scale. In contemporary era, use of email and electronic media can be a chief tool in reawakening of basics and fundamentals of Islamic civilization. In this way Muslims can ask questions and renew teachings of Quran and Sunnah (Ernst, 2003, pp. 209-210).

Concluding Remarks:

Revitalization of foundations of Islamic civilization and removing faults from Muslim society is the most challenging factor for the Muslims of modern era. Despite the fact that the structure and fundamentals of Islam have been well defined in the Divine Revelation Quran and Sunnah of Holy Prophet (SAW), the real

identity of Islamic Civilization has been distorted by Western discourses in particular and misinterpretation of religious leadership who lacks deep insight in the sources of Islam.

There is an urgent need to revive characteristics of Muslim society following the guidelines of Quran and Sunnah with support system of technology and advances of modern era. Thus Muslim Ummah would be able to regain its glory and honour that have been lost.

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