

Civilization In An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Civilization is a multidimensional concept used in different connotations and meanings. It signifies the ideological fervor that contours the edifice of a society and shapes the formation of social institutions. It sets up the goals which individuals and society strive to attain and develop different social mechanisms and organizations to that effect. It directs individuals to lead life in a distinct way for a distinct purpose. Civilization in Islamic intellectual ethos is to uphold Allah's guidance, and establish His order on earth. Islamic civilization is based on the revelatory doctrine underlying the sovereignty and ascendancy of Allah (swt) and its manifestation in every walk of individual and social life. It reflects a composite system of life based on the supremacy of Allah (swt), adores human dignity, maintains righteousness and justice and promotes moderation in thought and action.

Abstrak

Tamadun adalah konsep multidimensi yang digunakan dalam konotasi dan maksud yang berbeza. Ia melambangkan keghairahan ideologi kontur bangunan masyarakat dan membentuk formasi institusi sosial. Ia menggariskan matlamat individu dan masyarakat yang berusaha untuk mencapai dan membangunkan mekanisme dan organisasi sosial yang berlainan. Ia mengarahkan individu untuk memimpin kehidupan dengan cara yang berbeza untuk tujuan yang berbeza. Tamadun dalam etos intelektual Islam adalah untuk menegakkan hidayat petunjuk Allah (swt) dan mendirikan pemerintah-Nya di muka bumi. Ketamadunan Islam adalah berdasarkan kepada doktrin yang diwahyukan yang mendasari kedaulatan dan kekuasaan Allah (swt) dan manifestasinya dalam tiap-tiap individu dan kehidupan sosial. Ia mencerminkan sistem komposit hidup yang berasaskan pada keagungan Allah (swt), memuja kepada maruah manusia, mengekalkan kebenaran dan keadilan dan menggalakkan kesederhanaan dalam pemikiran dan tindakan.

Introduction

This paper explains the concept of civilization as used and interpreted in the literature of social science to understand the peculiarities of humans and their society at a particular space and time. It stresses that its real meaning lies in understanding the transcendental and phenomenal reality, formation of ideals and social mechanism to attain them. It further expounds civilization and its importance from an Islamic

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perspective and discusses the hallmarks of Islamic civilization and its distinctness.

Civilization is a refined and sophisticated way of leading life. It is a polished and elegant mode of living distinct characteristic of a society. It alludes to “a state of human society that is more developed and organized”¹ and has “its own culture and institutions.”² It refers to the composite system by which a society operates, attains the ideals which it cherishes and trains its members to adore the same ideals, work and live according to them as well as maintain, promote and preserve them. On that basis we differentiate people and group and identify them as savage, barbarian and modern and developed.

The word ‘civilization’ has been used in different connotations that it loses its vitality. According to Fernandez-Armesto it has “meant so many different things to different people that it will be hard to retrieve it from abuse and restore useful meaning to it.”³ However, it is used to denote lettered traditions or cultural heritages from pre-modern cities to modern cities.⁴ It also refers to an area, place and span of time characterize of a particular way of life and set of thought. In historical perspective civilization is used in the similar sense referring to the entire composite condition prevailing at a particular place and time. As such, we speak of ancient civilization, Chinese civilization or Western civilization. A. Al-Azmeh remarks:

...civilizations for contemporary historical writing have come to comprise the total historical conditions that exist in a specific space and time: functional and organizational forms of the state, the *longue duree* of demographic, agricultural, economic, social, urban, ecological, climatic, and other forces underwritten by geographical structures and relations, and non-material culture, such as arts, letters, cognitive structures, and religions.⁵

¹ *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Seventh Edition, 2005.

² *Macmillan English Dictionary*, International Student Edition, 2002.

³ Fernandez-Armesto, Felipe, *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 12.

⁴ Hodgson, Marshall G. S., *The Venture of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press).

⁵ Al-Azmeh, A., ‘Civilization, Concept and History of’, in Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Eds.-in-chief) *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 3 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001) 1908.

To make it clear Fernandez-Armesto prefers to explain it as particular continuities prevalent in a society, “such as a common religion or ideology or sense of belonging to a “world order”; or a common writing system or mutually intelligible language; or shared peculiarities of technology, agronomy, or food or consistency of taste in art, or some combination of such features.”⁶ It, according to him, also reflects “a process of collective self-differentiation from a world characterized, implicitly or explicitly, as “barbaric” or “savage” or “primitive.”⁷ Further, he observed, that it is explained as “a supposed stage or phase which the histories of societies commonly go through or which they achieve at their climax.”⁸ In this sense it indicates the process of development that goes on in a society to improve social and physical environment. Fernandez-Armesto was not satisfied with these explanations of civilization and preferred to define it in terms of the relationship with the natural environment. He observed:

I propose to define it as a type of relationship: a relationship to the natural environment, recrafted, by the civilizing impulse, to meet human demands. By a “civilization” I mean a society in such a relationship. I do not necessarily mean that all civilizations are in any sense good, though I happen to like some of them, or bad, though I am aware of their dangers.⁹

Civilization is a Latinate word derived from *civis* and indicated the culture of city which was center of production and exhibited a refined way of acting and doing. Karl Marx (1818-1883) found it the seat of ancient civilization. Max Weber (1864-1920) highlighted its different aspects: as a spatial entity; as a market characterized for production or the garrison city and consumer city based on the role it played in socio-economic structure of a society. City itself was regarded a developed human settlement showing better way of acting, exhibiting superior way of production and governance of other parts of the region and thus, considered a symbol of civilized life. It developed a culture which was

⁶ Fernandez-Armesto, *Civilization: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*, 12-13

⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 14.

quite different from agrarian settlement. In ancient time particularly in Mesopotamia the agrarian system is controlled by urban entrepreneurs who used to spend capital and regulate the plantation. Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) viewed city-men civilized because they practiced craft and led a sedentary life. Social scientists distinguished between city life and agrarian life based on patriarchal families. They highlighted city-based political civilization and economy of extended households. The Weberian concepts of political and economic man attracted the attention of men of knowledge. As a matter of fact, they explained modern society as economy of collective housekeeping and compared it with the ideal of citizen. In this context Gunnar Myrdal (1898-1987) was important, who studied the development of the economy of collective housekeeping. Civilization is now considered a master concept, “bears enormous semantic and historical density”¹⁰ and has affinity with modernity. Civilization first appeared in English language in the first decade of the eighteenth century in juridical sense. It denoted the conversion of a criminal matter to a civil one. Later on it was extended to the modern connotation in the second half of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century the term was frequently used to refer to superior pattern of thought and action confined to and projected by elite classes. In nutshell civilization connotes a developed way of living based on superior technology for satisfying human needs and providing maximum comfort to humanity particularly material comfort.

Civilization is also used synonymous with culture. Both the terms are used almost interchangeably. The famous anthropologist Edward Tylor (1832-1917) explained culture conflated with civilization. According to him both refer to “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”¹¹ He observed that culture developed in both of its aspects material and non-material like natural law. Franz Baos (1858-1942) considered human history as the peculiarities of local cultural growth. Every culture, according to him, has its own integrity and should be understood in terms of its own system of values. He defined culture “as the totality of mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behavior of the

¹⁰ Naqvi, Nauman, Civilization in William A. Darity Jr. ed. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 2nd edition, Vol.1 (New York: Thomson Gale, 2008), 557.

¹¹ Tylor, Edward B., *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, Vol.1 (London: J. Murray), 1

individuals composing a social group.”¹² Leslie White explained culture in broad sense and included not only the traits that characterize it but also that do not characterize it such as the traits that were considered as marginal, resistant and abjected.¹³ Samuel P. Huntington¹⁴ also uses both the term in similar meaning. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) found that the nature of both the terms is slippery. As such they express the slippery understanding and the frequent conflation of the two.¹⁵ Apart from this, some preferred to differentiate civilization from culture. Important among them is Edward Sapir who regarded civilization as “any socially inherited element in the life of man.” Culture according to him is “the expression of a richly varied yet somehow unified and consistent attitude toward life.” Further, he observed that civilization stands for the worldwide development and diffusion of all cultural materials, whereas culture refers to the temporary, local occurrence of unique, harmonious way of life. “Civilization, as a whole moves on; culture comes and goes”.¹⁶ In German language the words *kultur* and *zivilisation* stand for two different connotations. The former refers to symbols and values and the later refers to technical, economic and political ideas and organization.¹⁷ Anthropologists of the nineteenth century observed that “culture is earlier and civilization is later. Everything created by man is culture; civilization is an advanced state of cultural development. Culture developed in three stages: savagery to barbarism and to civilization”.¹⁸ According to Alfred Louis Kroeber culture is super organic and it has three forms namely social culture (status and role), value culture (philosophy and morals) and reality culture (science and technology etc.)

¹² Boas, Franz, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 159.

¹³ White, Leslie A., and Beth Dillingham, *The Concept of Culture* (Minneapolis MN: Burgess Publishing, 1973), 32.

¹⁴ Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

¹⁵ Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History on Mankind*, Abridged and Intro., Frank E. Manual, Trans. T. O. Churchill, 1800 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1784] 1968).

¹⁶ Sapir, E., ‘Culture, genuine and spurious’, in D. Mandelbaum (ed.) *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir* (Berkeley: CA, 1949 [1924]), 309, 314-315, 317.

¹⁷ John Scott and Gordon Marshall, (Eds.) *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 132-133.

¹⁸ <http://dilipchandra12.hubpages.com/hub/Difference-between-Culture-and-civilization>

while civilization is a part of reality culture.¹⁹ Robert Redfield viewed culture as the totality of traditions and civilizations as the totality of great and little traditions.²⁰ Sociologists also find difference between these two terms. According to them:

Culture includes religion, art, philosophy, literature, music, dance, etc. which brings satisfaction and pleasure to many. It is the expression of final aspects of life. Civilization includes all those things by means of which some other objectives are attained. Type writers, motors, etc. come under this category. Civilization consists of technology or the authority of man over natural phenomenon as well as social technology which control man's behavior. Culture is what we are while civilization is what we have. Culture has no standard of measurement because it is an end itself. Civilization has a précised standard of measurement. The universal standard of civilization is utility because civilization is a means. Culture cannot be said to be advancing. It cannot be asserted that the art, literature, thoughts are ideals of todays and superior to those of past. Civilization is always advancing. The various constituents of civilizations namely machines, means of transportation, communication, etc. are constantly progressive. Culture is internal and as an end. It is related to internal thoughts, feelings, ideals, values, etc. It is like the soul of an individual. Civilization is external and a means. It is the means for the expression and manifestation of the grandness; it is the body of an individual.²¹

The significant issue in understanding of both the concepts is that culture is used to refer to conceptual or non-material aspect of human life while civilization is used to denote material aspect that is machines, tools and all other objects employed to lead life. This is narrow interpretation of civilization as it is beyond and above all cultural traits. It signifies the ideological vehemence that lies behind the societal system, provides energy to it and makes it operate in a distinct way. It deals with the fundamental principles, the doctrine that creates social formation, structures institutions and set up the path on which social life makes headway.

CIVILIZATION IN AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Civilization in an Islamic perspective is a broad concept. It relates to the entire phenomenon of human life, its origin, purpose and the way

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

it operates. In Arabic, the two words: *thaqafa* and *hadara* are used to signify culture and civilization. *Thaqafa* is “an equivalent to the German *Bildung*, came to stand for culture, normally taken to designate intellectual and artistic life in a manner strongly elitist in character, and *hadara* was used for civilization, taken as more general concept indicating the entire life of a society including material life.”²²

Civilization delineates the ultimate reality, the world, things that lie in it, and human beings. It specifies the ontological and cosmological realities and the relation between them. It, further, explains how humans identify these realities, manifest in their thought and actions, raises the edifice of social structure and operates in this world in a distinct way. It is beyond and above social formation and human collectivity and reflects the set of principles and thought that lay the foundation of a society and motivate its members to work within the parameters of societal bases. It determines the goal of human life and brings out how humans develop different social mechanisms, use different objects and adopt different strategies to obtain the goal. It is the synthesis of spiritual and material aspects of the universe that constructs the contours of a society, it institutes the social life of its members. S. N. Eisenstadt perceives civilization in the same way:

Civilization as combination of ontological or cosmological visions, of conceptions of trans-mundane and mundane reality, with the definition, construction, and regulation of the major arenas of social life and interaction.²³

The basis of civilization is the ideological fervor that organizes people into a distinct collectivity, shapes the institutional formation and directs individuals to strengthen, maintain and implement the ideological traits in their lives. It gives meaning to social life and directs it to operate in such a way as to fulfill the purpose for which it comes into being. This is the reason that Islamic civilization provides a comprehensive and composite system of life based on overall welfare and development of humanity and brings forth a better and healthiest existence.

²² Al-Azmeh, A., ‘*Civilization, Concept and History of*’, 2001, 1906.

²³ Eisenstadt, S. N., ‘Civilization’, in Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, eds. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences & Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 3 (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), 1916.

ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

Islamic civilization is based on a splendid system not created by any individual and developed by any society but revealed by God, the ultimate living reality, and the vital force behind the existence of every object animate and inanimate. Human is the most superior and propitious creature of God and is created for a definite purpose. As such God revealed through his last Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) a complete set of guidance known as the Qur'an so that human may live in a dignified way, use His bounties properly, establish His ascendancy and serve the purpose of his creation. The guidance manifests the absolute knowledge and wisdom of God, lays down the cardinal principles and theoretical framework which serve the bedrock of Islamic civilization. The Prophet (pbuh) applied those principles in different aspects of behavior and in different social settings to give them practical shape. These paramount principles and their activation in operational framework steer humans to organize their resources, cooperate with each other, establish social set up and operate accordingly. Thus, the revelation (the Qur'an) and its operational framework (the Sunnah) structure the institutional formation and collective identities and constitute the component of the formation of Islamic society and give birth to Islamic civilization. Islamic civilization is characterized by certain distinct features that dignify humanity, keep it away from excess in mercy and affection and from deficiency in equity and justice.

COMPOSITE SYSTEM OF LIFE

Islamic civilization represents a composite and comprehensive system where all aspects of human life are blended into one, working within their own limit contribute to the smooth and purposive functioning of the system as a whole. It is based on certain cardinal principles; work along them and for the attainment of the sublime purpose of human creation. It reflects a unitary view of human life and its operation in the world. The paramount and pre-eminent principle that contours the edifice of Islamic civilization is the oneness, omnipotence and omniscience of God. This pervades the existence and consciousness of the believers and on the basis of which they produce social life. As a matter of fact, there is no distinction between sacred and profane, material and non-material aspects of life. They are assimilated and subsumed into one and project a unified picture of life. Hence, the whole life of a believer is an act of worship (*ibadah*) and is spent to seek the

pleasure of God. All activities of believers even the trivial one are important because they are part of the submission to God's will. Any activity even the prayer performed to obtain the purpose other than that is not acceptable by God and not considered *ibadah*.

Islamic civilization also does not distinguish between state and religion as we witness in other civilizations. In modern time there is great hue and cry about the separation of religion from the state. It is said that religion is a private affair of individuals and it should be limited to their personal matter and should not interfere in public affairs which fall under the jurisdiction of the state. This view emerged from the eighteenth century socio-political condition of Europe where there was a conflict between church and state. At that time the ruling elite used religion to rationalize their acts, safeguard their interest and protect their position. In reaction to that apathy against religion developed and limited its scope to the activities of individuals relating to their personal life. The position of Islam is quite different. Religion in this system is not only an aspect of human behaviour but it encompasses all activities which human performs in order to live in this world and thus, covers his whole life. The Arabic world which connotes the idea of religion is *Din* which is a broad and comprehensive term and refers to a system of life based on certain cardinal principles. These principles organize individuals into group and communities, develop institutions, and mould them in a distinct way so that they may help individuals to attain the final purpose of life. Thus, all institutions are interrelated, function in collaboration with each other, provide strength and vitality to the system at large and contribute positively to its smooth functioning. Political institution is an important wing of society. It cannot work independently but in coordination and in tune with the cardinal principles and the purpose for the attainment of which society structures its resources and patterns its activities.

SOVEREIGNTY AND SUZERAINTY OF GOD

The fundamental principle on which the arch of Islamic civilization rests is the doctrine of *al-tawhid* (unity of God). It implies that 'there is no god but God'. The Islamic term of God is Allah (swt). The Qur'an time and again categorically declares that Allah (swt) is the One and Only, the Eternal, the Absolute and has no beginning or end

and none has equal to Him.²⁴ He is the Absolute Reality, the Supreme Power, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful and Beneficent. “He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy one, Peace, the Keeper of faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb”.²⁵ He is Infinite, has innumerable attributes and has utmost power beyond the comprehension of finite human beings. He can do whatever He likes. He created the heavens and the earth and things that lie in between them. The uniqueness of His creative power is that He does not require any cause to create any thing because He is the cause of all causes. Every thing in the world works according to His plan and will and follows the path which He establishes. He created human being for a distinct purpose that is to completely surrender to His will and elevated him to the position of vicegerent. Humans’ foremost duty is to follow His system that He revealed, manifest His command in his thought and actions, implement His order on earth and lead life accordingly.

The unity, the eminence and the ascendancy of Allah (awt) is expressed in one or the other way in every unit, constituent element and every aspect of Islamic civilization as well as in thought and actions of its adherents. The Prophet (pbuh) who was the symbol and epitome of righteousness, truthfulness, straightforwardness and generosity reflected Allah’s ascendancy in his each and every action by following His command and will in true spirit. He set up the pattern and procedure of performing certain act, satisfying one’s urges, establishing relationship with fellow beings and other objects in accordance with the Divine guidance and command and gave body and soul to Islamic civilization. The legacy and the heritage of that civilization has been maintained and continued in one or the other pretext to the contemporary era. The fact is that the familial, economic and political subsystems of Islam are based on the supremacy of Allah (swt). Consequently they absorb and reflect His supremacy. The behavioural pattern of Muslims and their day-to-day activities are the manifestation of these traits.

Muslims always manifest the greatness of Allah (swt) in their thinking and contemplation of phenomenon realities. They display His superiority by considering Him the most eminent living and creative power, not equating him with any other living being, force and object, giving Him the immense respect and reverence, preferring His system

²⁴ The Qur’an, 112: 1-5.

²⁵ The Qur’an, 59: 22-24.

and code of conduct, according highest priority to His laws and commands and overall enormously succumbing to His will. They begin their day by waking early in the morning, meet natural urges, purify themselves, go straight to present themselves to His domain, praise His greatness, seek His forgiveness and guidance and proclaim to act to seek His pleasure and spend the day accordingly. They try to the best of their endeavour to strictly follow the etiquettes, behavioural norms and principles of interaction exhibited by the Prophet (pbuh). They have, in fact, fear of God and, thus they negate all those acts, principles and behavioural pattern that challenge God's supremacy and displease Him. Asad rightly observes:

It (the oneness and greatness of Allah) not only teaches us that all life is essentially a unit-because it proceeds from the Divine oneness-but it shows us also practical way how every one of us can reproduce, within the limits of his individual, earthly life, the unity of ideas and actions both in his existence and his consciousness.²⁶

HUMAN UNITY AND EQUALITY

The other important basis and feature of Islamic civilization is human unity and equality. It declares that all humans are one, constitute a composite whole called humanity. They are created by the same Lord with the same elements and on the same nature. They are the progeny of the same father and mother and stand at the same footing. There is no difference in inherent nature of them; there are no superiority and inferiority between and among them. No one has the rank of nobility and others have the position of serfs and chattels. Instead, they are equals, have close bond and affinity with each other because they are the creatures of the Lord of the World, have the same ideology, have the same responsibility and have the same mission to carry on in every nook and cranny of the world. The fellow feeling and the similitude of the mission make them brethren of each other and so far so being they build a 'single brotherhood' for which Islamic civilization is characterized and

²⁶ Asad, Mohammad, 'Islam: Basic Principles and Characteristics', in Khurshid Ahmad, ed., *Islam: Its Meaning and Message* (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1976), 46.

differ from others. It was a revolutionary step when the Qur'an declared the unity of humankind and exhorted the universality of Divine mission.

O mankind! reverence your guardian. Lord, Who created you from a single Person. Created of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women – fear Allah, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and reverence the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you.^{27 28}

It abolished the century long differences which human created between them on the basis of caste, creed and nobility and accorded distinction according to those criteria. It reminded humans that they are the offspring of Adam who was made of clay. Thus, their proud and superiority of descent and ancestry are false. It expounded the unity of humankind based on the unity of God. These principles laid the foundation of an egalitarian society and civilization where all humans have the same status, enjoy the same privilege and have the same right on the bounties of God. This doctrine of universal unity of humankind exalted the position of humans and placed them on high pedestal. The Qur'an further demolished the man-made hierarchy based on wealth, power and prestige and set up the only criterion of primacy of humans that is righteousness based on dedication and commitment to God's will and commandment. The Qur'an proclaims:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other. (Not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).²⁹

The principle of human unity and equality is the bedrock of Islamic civilization which, according to Abul Hasan Nadwi³⁰ establishes

²⁷ The Qur'an, Al-Nis [4]: 1.

²⁸ I have followed A. Yusuf Ali's translation, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur'an: New Edition with Revised Translation, Commentary and Newly Compiled Comprehensive Index*, Amanah Publications Beltsville, Maryland, U.S.A., Seventh Edition, 1416 AH/1995 AC.

²⁹ The Qur'an, Al-Hujurat [49]: 13.

³⁰ <http://www.central-mosque.com/biographies/nadwa14.htm>

a ‘commonwealth of believers’. It is a system, a set-up where people of different shade and colour join it assimilate in the ideological fervor of Islam, work day in and day out to seek the pleasure of the Lord and become the potential part of the whole. They are not discriminated on the basis of ethnic affiliation but given preference on the basis of morality, character and submission to God’s will.

HUMAN DIGNITY

Islamic civilization places human being on highest position. He is the most superior creature in the entire scheme of God’s creation. He is created at the best form³¹ and by the most superior element that is the spirit of God. He is equipped with superior qualities and has given highest rank, honour and dignity. This is human being for whom “God created all things that are on earth”,³² provided him with good things and gave special favor. Allah (swt) proclaims:

We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favour, above a great part of our creation.³³

Before the advent of Islam humans were degraded to lowest position. There were subordinated to even beast, trees and other inferior objects which were considered holy, supposed to be revered and taken care of at the cost of human life. Innocent persons were often sacrificed at the alter of these objects. Islam abolished these inhuman practices and considered them as great sins. Islamic civilization which was established by the Prophet (pbuh) impressed upon humans to realize their position as the servants of God, not to submit to the worldly objects that were inferior and subservient to humans and not the other way round. Islamic civilization instilled the notion of dignity into humans and stressed to maintain it at every level of action. It inspires humans to respect each other, not to treat them inferior or sub-human beings, not to

³¹ The Qur’an, Al Tin [95]: 4

³² The Qur’an, Al Baqarah [2]: 29.

³³ The Qur’an, Al Isra [17]: 70.

call them by derogatory names, treat them at equal level and give them all privileges which they want for themselves.

Human is exalted to the position of vicegerent and placed at the centre of the grand Divine scheme of creation. He is the chief executor of the Divine plan and is thrust an important responsibility upon him that is to be witness to truth, to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and to establish *Din* of Allah (swt) on earth. This responsibility itself is a great honour endowed to human by God and elevates his position in the entire kingdom of living beings. He lives and operates in this world not to please his own ego but to seek the pleasure of God. This responsibility makes him conscious of his position as the servant of God and enables him to live in peace and harmony with others and treat them as his close associates in carrying the torch of Divine mission throughout the globe. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi describes that this responsibility impacts human to treat his fellow beings well and in a dignified way. He cannot prefer him or his ambitions over others. Nadwi states:

The sense of responsibility in such persons would never allow them to sink to the level of beasts nor could they be cruel or harsh in their treatment of fellow-beings. They would never allow exploitation of others for their personal ends, nay, they would not tolerate a treatment which is derogatory to any human being.³⁴

The Prophet and his companions always respected people irrespective of their position and ethnic background. They were very particular that the dignity of even common people would not be damaged by any person. There were many instances in the heyday of Islamic civilization when people were punished for disrespecting others. This is the only civilization that gives due respect to everybody and safeguards the dignity of human beings.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND MORAL PRINCIPLES

Islamic civilization is based on righteousness and moral principles and gives highest priority to them. It impresses upon individuals to follow the high standard of morality in their behaviour and lives as well. It always encourages people to adopt righteous way in interacting with

³⁴ Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Religion and Civilization*, translated by Muhiuddin Ahmad (Lucknow (India): Academy of Islamic Research and Publications Lucknow (India), 1975), 101.

fellow-beings, performing different tasks and earning livelihood. It motivates people not to sacrifice these principles for material gains or some other benefits. Persons of high moral character enjoy high status and respect in this system. Islam itself is the embodiment of virtues, rectitude and upstanding principles and instils them into its adherents. It gives honour and prescribes high reward to those who exhibit these principles in their behaviour, do virtuous act and dedicate themselves to the faith. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's remark in this context shows the importance of these principles in Islamic society. He observes:

This was the only social order brought into existence since the beginning of the social existence of man on this planet which could claim to have its roots in moral precepts and an ethical ideology. In this society the criterion for nobility was neither race nor riches but moral virtue and awe of God. It did not discriminate between men on grounds of race, colour, or country nor did it bestow honour on those who could afford to live ostentatiously. It held in esteem only those who better in faith and virtuous in conduct.³⁵

There were many instances in Islamic history where righteous and virtuous acts were given preference over other aspects of human behaviour. The glaring example of Bilal, (the companion of the Prophet Muhammad [pbuh]) a black emancipated slave who was held in high esteem by the Prophet because of his dedication to the faith and high moral character. The other precedent is of Caliph 'Umar. He was going to Syria with his companions. In the way, Abu 'Ubaida had drawn his attention towards his patched shirt and he requested 'Umar to change it. To this 'Umar replied: "Abu 'Ubaida, it would have been better if I had not heard it from you. There was none more renegade, lowly and disgraced than us in the whole world. God bestowed honour on us through Islam. Now, if you want honour through anything else, God will again disgrace you."³⁶

EQUITY AND JUSTICE

³⁵ Ibid., 102.

³⁶ *Al-Bidaya Wan-Nihaya, Ibn Kathir* quoted by Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi in *Religion and Civilization*, 1975.

Equity and justice are also the hallmarks of Islamic civilization. The revelatory ideology on which Islamic civilization bases always preaches justice and fair play. It instructs its adherents to do justice to themselves that is to do righteous acts, strict to fair dealing and not to be part of unjust act, deal and undertaking. They should also be just to their fellow-beings as well as to other animate and inanimate objects and perform their duty to Allah (swt). The Qur'an emphasizes:

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to Piety: and fear Allah. For Allah well –acquainted with all that you do.³⁷

Islamic principles do not allow any body to give up what is right and just for the sake of any material gain or seeking favour of any person. Instead, it inspires people to help each other in virtue and justice alone and not in sin and transgression. It is the clarion call of the Creator:

. . . help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour: fear Allah: for Allah is strict in punishment.³⁸

In pursuance of this principle partisanship is strictly prohibited in Islamic civilization which is based on and promotes virtues, decency, nobility and goodness. It repudiates all those factors that hamper and impede the implementation of good values in society. This is the reason that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) proclaimed in categorical term that “he is not of us who gives a call in the cause of partisanship; he is not of us who dies in the cause of partisanship; and he is not of us who fights in the cause of partisanship”.³⁹ When one of his companions enquired what he meant by partisanship, the Prophet (pbuh) replied, “it means helping your own people in an unjust cause.”⁴⁰

³⁷ The Qur'an, Al Ma'idah [5]: 8.

³⁸ Ibid.: 1.

³⁹ Abu Daud, on the authority of Jubayr Ibn Mut'im.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Islamic civilization denounces partisanship, unfairness and injustice in order to strengthen and promote the values that lead humanity to right path and provide it with utmost benefit. It also condemns favouratism and all attempts and measures that give undue advantage to any person, tribe, group and nation. It maintains the integrity of all human beings and grants them all those basic rights necessary to lead a dignified life on earth. Islamic social order is based on the Divine system that is just and in the best interest of humanity. It creates congenial atmosphere to live with others in peace and harmony, enables all members to take care of the needs of each other, treat others as their close relatives and extend all possible help to others to live with grace and dignity. This is considered the most preferential act and for which humans are promised to get high reward. The exploitation, suppression, deprivation of one's genuine right and taking advantage of one's weaknesses are considered sins and punishable. This is the reason that believers are identified as protectors of one another and not competitors who always try to let others down to get some privileges. Their superiority and nobility is that they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong and surrender to the will of the Lord.⁴¹ Islamic civilization implants these virtuous qualities in society and imprints them on the mind and soul of its adherents. This makes it distinct from others.

MODERATION AND THE MIDDLE PATH

Islamic civilization promotes moderation in the lives of its adherents and impresses upon them to adopt middle path in dealing with people and other objects as well as in satisfying their urges and derives. It rejects extremism and too much involvement in material objects at the cost of basic duties which an individual is supposed to perform. Extremism of any kind neglects the other important aspect of life. This is the reason that Islam defies asceticism and monasticism. It also turns down the seclusion of individuals from the social world and living in a lonely place. Activities such as self-torture, self-annihilation, celibacy and penance, which some people consider as acts of devotion, are forbidden in Islam. Islam is a practical system of life and, thus, encourages people to live in society with other fellow beings, adopt righteous and moral way in dealing and establishing relation with others, satisfying their urges and performing their duties. In Islamic ideological

⁴¹ The Qur'an, Al Tawbah [9]: 71.

framework world is an essential part of *Din* and believers are instructed to enjoy God's bounties in moderate way, establish His ascendancy by following His guidance, live with their brethren in peace and harmony and make this world worth living place. Thus, according to Ziauddin Sardar, "the most significant indicator of man's nobility, besides righteousness, is the use of moderation and balance in his material dealings, reasoned pursuits and spiritual quests".⁴²

CONCLUSION

Civilization has been used in different shades of meaning that created vagueness and reduced its importance. Generally it is conceived as the material objects and social mechanism which humans developed at particular space and time to satisfy their needs and overall to live in the world in comfortable way. Civilization, in fact, is above all these materials and refers to certain set of principles, ideological fervor and worldview that structure human relations, determine the nature of social institutions, construct social organization and direct humans to live according to the Divine guidance and to attain the purpose of their creation. This is the subtle quality and substantive meaning of civilization which Islam projects. As such, Islamic civilization in one or the other pretext, reflects these traits and accentuates that it is based on a composite system of life, sovereignty and suzerainty of Allah (swt), unity, equality and dignity of human beings, righteousness and moral principles, equity and justice and in the last but not the least on moderation of thought and action. This is the distinctness on which it appeals all those who believe in the sovereignty of Allah (swt) to construct the world afresh.

⁴² Ziauddin Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 988), 18.