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NORMS OF RISE AND FALL OF CIVILIZATIONS IN THE QUR'AN

Beneficial Knowledge and Justice as a Model

Arshad Islam¹
Ruqaiya Taha Al-Alwani²

Abstract

This paper deals with some of the norms of the establishment and emergence of civilizations according to the Qur'an and analyses the components of such norms. The Qur'an gives explicit attention to the laws and norms on which human societies and civilizations are based, directly and indirectly, by telling the stories of peoples in past eras. The Qur'an also emphasizes that giving priority to the pursuit of material aspects and elements of societies while neglecting their religious and moral aspects is a reason for the decline and collapse of civilizations, as was the case with the people of Sheba. This paper clarifies that the most important norms of the establishment of civilizations include focusing attention on beneficial knowledge and instilling the value of justice in society. The study explores some conditions of previous nations that vanished owing to the absence of these two basic elements, as mentioned in the Qur'an. In conclusion, this article argues for further studies of the Quranic approach to the issue of the rise and fall of human civilizations. Contemporary societies need to be enlightened by the Quranic perspectives on the issue in the light of the present human condition.

Keywords: civilization-building, beneficial knowledge, justice, Qur'an, urbanism.

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Introduction

Through repeated admonitions regarding the rise and fall of civilizations, the Qur'an outlines an ethical philosophy of history. Although the Qur'an is not a history book, its demands that the reader considers the examples of previous nations entails the foundation and pillars for the philosophy of studying human history and human societies on earth. In his *al-Muqaddimah* ("Prolegomena"), Ibn Khaldun identified political, economic, and social factors as essential for the establishment and renaissance of any civilization, and the absence of any of these pillars would lead to the weakness and ultimate collapse of a civilization. The overriding ethos that underpins these factors mentioned in the Qur'an is submission to Allah's will and injunctions, entailing beneficial knowledge and justice. There is a clear link between the latter two factors and the concept of urbanism in the Qur'an. Ibn Khaldun and those who came after him presented a number of examples to explain the concept of urbanism related to human society. He devoted a chapter to talking about livelihood and the means of earning it, and concluded that if a civilization's urbanization decreases, its means of subsistence will diminish, because trade, agriculture, and industry are all predicated on urbanization, which in turn is predicated on beneficial knowledge and justice.³ Accordingly, this paper deals with the key norms of the rise and fall of civilizations singled out by the Qur'an in different positions about a number of former peoples and previous civilizations.

Previous Studies

Many studies have dealt with the issue of the norms of the rise and collapse of civilizations and nations; the most notable modern studies are Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918), published in English as *The Decline of the West* (1991), and Arnold J. Toynbee's twelve volume *The Study of History* (1954-61). Both were attempts to deal with the existential angst of Western civilization

³ Ibn Khaldun, A. R., *Muqadimat Ibn Khaldun*, (Beirut: Dār Al-Jīl, 2013), 114.

after the holocaust of the First World War, and the terrifying realization that Western materialism was not a guarantee of eternal civilizational superiority and continuity. Ibn Khaldun was the pioneer of panoramic analyses of civilizational determinants, rooted in an analysis based on the narrations and norms of the rise and collapse of civilizations outlined in the Qur'an. Al-Alfiy emphasized that beneficial knowledge that provides humanity with good and stability is one of the most significant factors in the rise of nations and civilizations, and underlined that the fall of civilizations does not often come from outside, but rather from within the civilization itself.⁴

Khaldunian studies have become an important field in their own right. Among important modern books on this subject is *Norms of Rise and Fall of Civilizations: in the Past and Present, According to Ibn Khaldun's Views*.⁵ The writer dealt with several civilizations, including the Sumerian, Babylonian, Greek, and Islamic, focusing on economic, political, and geographical factors. The book examines the empirical application of Ibn Khaldun's theories to the historical study of the rise and collapse of civilizations. Another extraordinary study in this field is Imad Eddin Khalil's *Introduction to Islamic Civilization*,⁶ which identifies the determinants of the rise and collapse of Islamic civilization through the verses of the Qur'an, which is posited as a governing source over all historical theories and analyses. In *Civilization: A Study of the Rules & Factors of Its Rise & Development*, Munies (1978) gives examples from different human civilizations, focusing on Islamic civilization in particular because it is the closest civilization, and examined the ideas of the most important Muslim thinkers, especially Ibn Khaldun and his theory of the urban cycle. The most important feature of this book is that it presents a different reading and scientific examination of the subject of civilization and its course through history.⁷ In addition, it presents

⁴ Al-Alfiy, O, *The Factors of the Rise and Fall of Civilizations in the Holy Qur'an*, (Cairo: Alhayyah Almisriyah Aleamat Lilkitab, 2010), 45-46.

⁵ Abdul Latif al-Ḥumaidan, *Norms of Rise and Fall of Civilizations: in the Past and Present, according to Ibn Khaldun's Views*, 86.

⁶ Imad Eddin Khalil, *Introduction to Islamic Civilization*, (Beirut: Scientific Publishers, 2005), 57-58.

⁷ Hussien Munies, *Civilization: A Study of the Rules & Factors of Its Rise &*

these ideas in comparison to important historians of world civilizations, such as Toynbee.⁸

Urbanism in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, the term *'umrān* (urbanism) is not used as a single word, but some of its derivations are mentioned therein, such as *'amarūhā* (they populated it), *ista'marakum* (He made you dwell therein), *ma'mūr* (the much-frequented), and *'imārah* (maintenance). The following are some Qur'anic texts in which derivatives of urbanism are mentioned: "And He made you dwell therein (the earth);"⁹ "And they populated it (the earth) more and better than these have populated it;"¹⁰ "And maintenance of the Holy Mosque in a good and flourishing state."¹¹

Although the term "urbanism" is not expressly mentioned in the Qur'an, the concept is mentioned in more than one verse and in various contexts. Through tracing such verses and linking them to the *Surahs* that talked about the concept of urbanism, the contemplator may come to a more precise understanding of the system of urbanism in the Qur'an. If we examine the linguistic meaning of the term "urbanism" in all its aspects, we will realize that it is a human act on this earth, which Allah the Almighty wanted to make as a field for trial and test, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an: "And (recall) when your Lord said to the angels, I will create a vicegerent on earth,"¹² and "It is He Who brought you forth from the earth and made you dwell therein."¹³ Hence, Ibn 'Ashur explained the meaning of urbanism in terms of the Adamic human mission:

"the vicegerent is Adam. His mission as a vicegerent on this earth is fulfilled by implementing the will of Allah Almighty and building up the earth as revealed to Adam

Development, (Kuwait: National Council for Culture and Arts, 1978), 6.

⁸ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, trans. Fuad Shibl, vol. 4, (Cairo: National Centre for translation, 2011), 68.

⁹ The Qur'an, *Surah Hūd* 11:61.

¹⁰ The Qur'an, *Surah al-Rum* 30: 9.

¹¹ The Qur'an, *Surah al-Tawbah* 9:19

¹² The Qur'an, *Surah al-Baqarah* 2:29.

¹³ The Qur'an, *Surah Hūd* 9:61.

or as he is inspired to, and indoctrinating his descendants with the will of Allah Almighty intended from this earthly world.”¹⁴

Hence, urbanism, according to the Qur'an, is not limited to the abstract realm of material applications and manifestations, such as industries and physical constructions; rather, it covers everything that could enable man to fulfil his mission as a vicegerent on this earth, including values, morals, and principles that are essential and indispensable to human life. Accordingly, Muhammad Rashid Rida explained that man's mission as a vicegerent on this earth, when first mentioned, was justified with Allah's saying: “that We might see how you would act,”¹⁵ i.e., that God might behold how humans behave in the earth, and thus reward and punish them accordingly. According to this view, this has been the eternal wont of Allah in relation to human civilizations throughout history. The Children of Adam have been entrusted with the mission to establish truth and justice in the earth, and purify it from the abomination of polytheism and transgression, and not merely to indulge their own selfish whims. Several verses of the Qur'an explain the different aspects of urbanism, including the following:

“Allah has promised those of you who believe and do deeds of righteousness that He will surely make them successors (vouchsafed with both spiritual and temporal leadership) on the earth as He made successors (from among) their predecessors, and that He will surely establish for them their faith which He has approved for them, and that He will surely replace their state of fear with a state of security and peace. They will worship Me (alone) and they will not associate anything with Me. And those who show ingratitude for all the favours done to them after that (His promise is fulfilled), it is they who will be reckoned as the worst disobedient.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Muhammad al-Tahir ibn 'Ashur, *al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 1, (Tunisia: Al-Dār al-Tūnisīyah, 1984), 399.

¹⁵ The Qur'an, *Surah Yūnus* 10:14.

¹⁶ The Qur'an, *Surah An-Nūr* 24:55.

The earth has been created to facilitate human servitude to Allah; while humans have the free will to abdicate this responsibility and follow their own selfish desires, they also have the capability to submit to the will of the Creator by believing in Him and doing good deeds. All those that are in the heavens and on the earth submit to Allah:

“The seven heavens, the earth and all those inhabiting them extol His glory. In fact, there is not even a single thing but glorifies Him with His true and perfect praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Verily, Most Forbearing is He, Great Protector.”¹⁷

The Qur’an teaches man that the whole universe is made available to all nations for their use without making any distinction between them. Therefore, the Qur’an stresses the importance of exploring the universe and studying it empirically with the view of discovering its systems and laws. Such a method of exploration is constantly called for by the Qur’an, which attaches great importance to the use of the senses in man’s exploration of the earth and beyond.

Allah has created man and made him as a vicegerent on earth with the intention of building and developing it. To achieve this goal and purpose, He has made subservient to man all resources and wealth in the heavens and the earth. Allah says:

“It is He Who brought you forth from the earth and made you dwell therein.”¹⁸

“We have indeed established you in the earth (giving you power therein), and provided for you therein (various) means of subsistence. How little thanks you give!”¹⁹

“It is He Who made the earth a bed for you and has threaded it with pathways for you. He sends down rain

¹⁷ The Qur’an, *Surah Al-‘Isrā’* 17:44.

¹⁸ The Qur’an, *Surah Hud* 9:61.

¹⁹ The Qur’an, *Surah Al-A‘rāf*: 7:10.

from the clouds. We bring forth by means of this (water) pairs of vegetation of diverse kinds.”²⁰

The human being is central to civilizational pursuits; however, such a pursuit is subject to the right relationship of human beings with their Creator. The human being as a vicegerent acts on the planet earth, which sets the stage for his urbanization activities. His role is to fulfil the command of Allah through worship, governance of the universe according to His laws, and exemplary conduct in manifesting the teachings of Islam based on the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah.²¹

The Children of Adam have had flashes of brilliance and responsible custodianship in their civilizational history, but there were also periods of decline, disintegration, and collapse. Hence, many chapters of the Qur'an call attention to the observable evidence of these historical phenomena, alluding to the monumental remains of great civilizations that collapsed into ruins because their inhabitants became ungrateful for Allah's favours, attributing success to themselves and being consumed by selfishness, arrogance, and oppression. Consequently, their urbanization ended up with devastation and destruction, as was the case with the peoples of Hud, Saleh, Pharaoh, and others. They stood condemned by their own actions, and their civilizations were annihilated. Such has been the way of Allah in treating those who gloried in the material aspects of urbanization, but neglected its faith-based values, particularly gratitude to the Creator, and justice and mercy to His creation and servants. The Qur'an says:

“Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with ‘Ād of Iram, possessors of tall statures and lofty columns, the like of whom have not been created in these parts of land? And (how He dealt with the tribe of) Thamūd who hewed out huge rocks in the valley (to make their housings)? And (how He dealt with) Pharaoh, lord of

²⁰ The Qur'an, *Surah Tāhā* 20:53.

²¹ Al-Tayyib Barghuth, *Manhaj Al-Nabi Salla Allah Alayhi Wa-Sallama Fi Himayat Al-Dawah Wa-Al Muhafazah Ala Munjazatiha Khilala Al-Fatrah Al-Makkiyah*, (USA: Al-Ma'had Al-'Alami Lil-Fikr Al-Islami, 1996), 59.

vast hosts? (All these people were) those who committed (all sort of) excesses in the cities, and they spread a lot of corruption and lawlessness therein, (So much) so that your Lord let loose on them the scourge and various kinds of punishments.”²²

The Qur’an stipulates the spiritual and ethical foundations on which urbanism is based, and the values that protect it from all manifestations of transgression and tyranny and anything that could lead to its corruption and devastation. Hence, many classical and recent Muslim scholars have emphasized the impact of monotheism on human urbanization, and the effect of its absence in undermining the nations and peoples, no matter how advanced their physical urbanization was. Al-Tartushi’s *Sirāj Al-Mulūk* explained that any civilized act can be achieved only when its components of religion and morals are available. He deduced the following maxim that summarizes the basis of civilization in justice:

“There is no ruler but with soldiers, no soldiers but with money, no money but with tax, no tax but with urbanization, and no urbanization but with justice; therefore, justice is the basis for all authorities.”²³

Thus, guided by the approach of the Qur’an, Al-Tartushi stressed that mercy and justice are the basis of competent government, and the key to a thriving urbanization (and associated prosperity and increased standards of living).

Beneficial Knowledge is the Basis for the Establishment of Civilizations

Beneficial knowledge means that which brings good to its holder and to others in this world and in the hereafter. It includes knowledge of the laws of individual and social human action, the causes and motives of human behaviour, and the requirements for repelling harms and achieving benefits. It reveals the characteristics of man

²² The Qur’an, *Surah Al-Fajr* 89:6-13.

²³ Muhammad ibn al-Walid Al-Tartushi, *Kitāb Sirāj Al-Mulūk*, (Skandarīyah: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Waṭanīyah, 1990), 1:54.

and his unique nature in his different dimensions. It clarifies the rules and norms that control the movement of society and the interaction of its components and sectors in terms of their emergence and growth, continuity and disappearance, survival and annihilation, goodness and corruption, development and decline, strength and weakness, devastation and urbanization. Without this knowledge, no other knowledge or work of man will be valid. Such knowledge is not measured by material standards or scientific degrees, but by the goals and values it achieves. A person may learn some kinds of knowledge that do not benefit him or anyone else; in contrast, beneficial knowledge serves as society's gateway to righteousness and goodness, and closes all gaps that enable corruption and sabotage.

Hence, the Qur'an repeatedly speaks of the stature of knowledge based on faith and fear of Allah. It shows that man's real status is first and foremost exalted by knowledge. Consequently, ignorance-based sovereignty contradicts beneficial knowledge, and thus cannot lead to prosperity or stability. Allah says: "Those who have been given knowledge know that whatever has been revealed to you from your Lord is the very lasting truth, and that it guides to the path of the All-Mighty, the Highly Praiseworthy."²⁴ Allah says: "O you who believe! be careful of (your duty to) Allah with the care which is due to Him, and do not die unless you are Muslims."²⁵

It is narrated by Al-Tirmidhi on the authority of Zaid bin Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said:

"The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) ordered me to learn some statements from writings of the Jews for him, and he said: 'For indeed by Allah! I do not trust the Jews with my letters'. He said: Half a month did not pass before I learned it, when he (peace be upon him) wanted to write to the Jews, I would write it to them, and when they wrote to him, I would read their letters to him."²⁶

Knowledge is measured by its benefit to man and society. Zaid bin

²⁴ The Qur'an, *Surah Saba'* 34: 6.

²⁵ The Qur'an, *Surah Al-i 'Im'rān* 3:102.

²⁶ Al-Tirmidhī, *Jami` al-Tirmidhī* 42: Chapter 22, Hadith No. 2715.

Thabit served his religion and society with skills. The more it benefits them, the more it is considered to be real knowledge. If knowledge turns into an instrument to harm man or society, it becomes an ordeal with dire consequences for human beings. *Surah Al-Naml* tells us that the Prophets David and Solomon (peace be upon them both) learned the material sciences of various industries, but this was underpinned by their moral strength of believing in Allah and giving credit to Him. They recognized that this knowledge is entirely due to Allah's grace upon them, and then they used it to preserve the religion, soul, honour, and money. Thus, they properly understood the lived reality, which was then dominated by glorifying the material aspect of knowledge and disregarding its moral and value-based dimensions. Therefore, the achievement of benefit through knowledge gives a sublime civilizational dimension, which is commanded and called for by the Qur'an, as Allah says:

“And relate to them the news of him to whom We gave Our commandments but he withdrew himself therefrom, the Satan followed him with the result that he became one of those who led astray (and became a pervert). Had We so willed, We would have exalted him (in ranks) thereby, but he remained inclined to (the material things of) this world and followed his low desires. His case therefore is like that of a dog, if you bear down upon it, it lolls its tongue out or if you leave it alone, it still lolls out its tongue. Such is the case with the people who cry lies to Our commandments; So narrate to them the account (of the people of old) that they may reflect.”²⁷

Beneficial knowledge means that which brings good to its holder and to others in this world and the hereafter, and makes him thoughtful, prudent, discerning, understanding, conscientious and aware of what he is doing. Allah says, “Those who have been given knowledge know that whatever has been revealed to you from your Lord is the very lasting truth.”²⁸ The knowledge that they acquired benefited

²⁷ The Qur'an, *Surah Al-A'rāf* 7:175-176.

²⁸ The Qur'an, *Surah Saba* ' 34: 6.

them, so they realized that what has been revealed to you from your Lord is the truth and not something else.

It is necessary that action is combined with and controlled by knowledge and trustworthiness for it to become effective and vibrant. In that way, it is headed in the right direction, so that it does not become absurd and free from the discipline of morals, religion, and humanity. It is fascinating that in Islam, action is crowned by knowledge and trustworthiness, whereby it becomes more powerful, blessed, and effective. Thus, action becomes connected to the right channels that nourish it, until it becomes a haven for those seeking equity and justice.²⁹ Hence, the Qur'an called for manufacturing, mining, and different trades that help man to achieve his mission as a vicegerent on this earth and to construct it. Furthermore, it paid close attention to the iron and steel industry and the development of various heavy and light industries.³⁰ It might be worth mentioning the case of the Prophet David (peace be upon him) being inspired to invent chain mail to prevent humans from their mutual violence – humans used technology to create weapons, but Allah inspired His Prophet to create means of protection.³¹ All of these industries can only be achieved through the beneficial knowledge that provides the individual, society, and civilization with strength and invulnerability among nations, and the ability to protect and defend their gains.

Knowledge, if not beneficial, would turn into a curse and destruction. The Qur'an referred in several places to nations and civilizations that excelled in learning, creativity, industry, and construction, but they were not guided by their knowledge to believing in the Oneness of Allah and building up the earth with righteousness and piety. Consequently, their knowledge and advanced civilization became a cause for decline and fall, accentuated by luxury and boastful pride. They behaved arrogantly in the land without any justification, acted unjustly, and were

²⁹ Raid Abdel-Rahim Asssi, *Power in the Qur'an*, (Palestine: An-Najah National University, College of Graduate Studies, 2009), 52.

³⁰ Al-Jumaily, B., *Siyasāt al- Tasnī fi dāwā Maqasīd al- Sharīyah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyāah, 2006), 46.

³¹ The Qur'an, *Surah Saba'* 34: 10-11.

self-indulgent and ungrateful. Allah warns humanity to take a lesson from the ruins of previous civilizations:

“Have they never travelled in the land so that they could see how (miserable) the end of their predecessors was? They were superior to them in numbers, mightier in force and stronger in respect of the (firm) marks, (fortification and monumental buildings) in the land; yet all their acquisitions were of no avail to them. And when their Messengers (of God) came to them with clear proofs they (vainly) boasted of their own partial knowledge. But they were caught by the very thing (the calamity) which they used to treat very lightly. So when they saw Our punishment they said, ‘We believe in Allah alone, and We reject (all) that we used to associate with Him.’³² But their belief was of little use to them when they have (actually) seen Our calamity. Such is the law of Allah that has ever been in vogue in respect of His servants. It is at such times that the disbelievers suffer a loss.”³³

Arrogance, injustice and indulgence in materialistic desires are serious indications of the spread of ignorance and the lack of beneficial knowledge, according to the Islamic paradigm. In the case of previous nations and peoples who did not adhere to divine guidance, materialistic knowledge and the expansion of urbanization and civilization led individuals and their societies to be deceived by their partial knowledge and false power, and distracted them from seeing the way of Allah. Allah says:

“(He) said, ‘(All) this (wealth) that I have been given is because of the knowledge I possess.’ But did he not know that Allah had destroyed before him generations of people who were mightier than he and greater in riches and number? And the guilty shall not be

³² The Qur’an, *Surah Ghāfir* 40:77.

³³ The Qur’an, *Surah Ghāfir* 40:82-85.

questioned about their sins (their sins being self-evident).”³⁴

Therefore, the Qur'an cautioned people against being deceived by knowledge that is not combined with faith. Its reference in the above verse to the fate of the wealthy and powerful Qarun, the Korah in the English Bible, who was destroyed only after he attributed knowledge to himself, and was arrogant and boastful of his scientific power to the extent that he disbelieved in Allah, has a clear message. The message is that mere materialistic advancement of civilization and urbanization is insufficient to guarantee the goodness of human life and protect it from collapse. Allah says:

“Until when the earth receives its excellent nature and has decked itself fairly beautiful and its owners feel sure that they are its masters We unexpectedly command its destruction either by night or by day, so We render it a field that is mown down as though nothing had existed there the day before. Thus do We explain in detail the signs for a people who reflect.”³⁵

The cumulative errors resulting from the lack of beneficial knowledge are the real reason behind the destruction of a civilization and the halting of its progress, which causes it to perish, often at the hands of other civilizations. Nations and civilizations fall apart from the inside, before their enemies bring them down; enemies can effectively overcome their opponents when their opponents are mired in cumulative errors and weaknesses that make them ripe for defeat. It is Allah's law that He made social injustice a reason for the destruction of the economy, and thus the other sources of strength for a civilization.³⁶

Building civilization should be based upon beneficial knowledge that contributes to educating humans to fulfil their exalted role, and not just developing the external resources available to gratify personal desires (the latter of which has been the primary

³⁴ The Qur'an, *Surah Al-Qaṣaṣ* 28:78.

³⁵ The Qur'an, *Surah Yūnus* 10:24.

³⁶ Omar Ubaid Hasna, *Hatāyṭahāqāq al- Shūhud al- Haḍāri*, (Damascus: Al-Maktāb al-Islamīey, 1991), 48.

motor of the civilization of modern globalized capitalism since the so-called Enlightenment). Beneficial knowledge is an ethical and holistic development that aims to produce true humans. It is thus not a worldly act, which aims merely to improve human life on earth and cater to the material interests of the individual and society. Rather, it aims to enable man to perform righteous deeds in the service of the Creator, which is the ultimate objective of beneficial knowledge. This has a clear positive impact on human energies, contributing to mobilizing, pooling, and coordinating between individuals to achieve their ultimate common objective, so they become more focused, more effective, more innovative, and more far-reaching in their beneficent impacts.

A number of Western intellectuals emphasized the role of human awareness in building true civilization and noted that humans in modernity are substantially lacking in this awareness. Toynbee posited that humanity is gripped by a stifling crisis, no less wicked than the two World Wars, and that the future is bleak. He stated that a man-made catastrophe would possibly occur wiping out all of humanity and destroying its living space; the development of nuclear weapons during the twentieth century makes the prospect of the absolute destruction of all human civilization on the planet a very real one. Toynbee observed that man has increased his material strength to such a degree that it has become a threat even to the survival of the living space to the great loss of spirituality; indeed, the mathematician and philosopher René Guénon holds the view that increase in material knowledge in modern Western civilization has been accompanied by a commensurate spiritual decline. Generally, scholars who have considered the issue of man's spiritual input in civilization building find that it is closely linked to the beneficial knowledge that leads man to a holistic view, which takes due account of all his material, intellectual, and spiritual energies.³⁷

Toynbee argued that the only reasonable change in the composition of the living space that could save it from the catastrophic crisis of modern materialism would be the spiritual empowerment of man. He asserted that man, in addition to being composed of a nature and a body, remains endowed with a soul,

³⁷ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 65-66.

which has consciousness and moral agency. Consequently, man can choose either good or evil. Toynbee believed that the disease of modern society can only be cured by a spiritual revolution in the hearts and minds of humankind; social ills cannot be cured by institutional changes. Hence, the only effective cure, according to Toynbee, is spiritual, because every social institution is based on an ethos which is either good or bad, according to the spiritual foundation upon which it rests. Consequently, humanity needs a new spiritual foundation, and many voices from all around the world emphasize the urgent need for faith today.³⁸

This conclusion of modern analysts reiterates the stipulation of the Qur'an that knowledge that does not guide nations to believing in the Oneness of Allah and building up the earth with righteousness and piety would lead them towards luxury and boast, so they behave arrogantly in the land without any justification, act unjustly and become self-indulgent. These consequences would turn into a cause for decline and fall. This is exemplified in the following verse, in which Allah says: "As for (the tribe of) Thamud, We gave them guidance, but they preferred misguidance to guidance so the scourge of a humiliating punishment seized them on account of the (bad) deeds they had done."³⁹

Justice is the Basis for the Establishment of Civilizations

Justice is one of the most complex and critical philosophical concepts in the history of human social thought, to the extent that some intellectuals consider that the whole human history is nothing but a conflict over the issue of justice. Although the issue of justice is one of the ethical dialectics that has been discussed in Western philosophy since ancient times, it has generally been conceptualized in the context of other philosophical concepts, such as rights and duties. The significance of justice in societies lies in the fact that social relations between individuals and groups cannot be duly maintained without justice as a moral value.⁴⁰ Although the concept

³⁸ Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 4, 78.

³⁹ The Qur'an, *Surah Fuṣṣilat* 41:17.

⁴⁰ The Arabic terms '*adl*' and '*adālah*' are used in this study as synonyms of "justice" for convenience, although some researchers distinguish between the two

of justice is major and central, there is no consensus among various philosophers and thinkers about its meaning, nature, and manifestations. Rather, intellectual perceptions have differed throughout the ages about its nature and spheres of application.

The complexity of the issue of justice throughout history arises from the fact that it is closely connected to other philosophical concepts such as rights, duties, freedoms, equality, goodness, and happiness, as justice is basically considered to be a proxy for the more fundamental question of how humans ought to live, and under what conditions. It is a humanitarian requirement linked to the journey of soul-searching, which can be achieved only by obtaining recognition from others. Such recognition means equivalence in value, which results in equivalence in rights and objectives. This means that justice stems primarily from the search for the correct or ideal situation for self-fulfilment; therefore, it is a solution to the problem of the incorrect situation of the self. The metaphysical foundations of all traditional societies provided a solid foundation for justice, rooted in spiritual beliefs, values, and laws, but in secular modernity attempts to develop a Kantian empirical science of justice have ultimately failed to get beyond the will (and whim) of contingent majorities and public opinion.

On the most quantifiable level – material prosperity, the *summum bonum* of modern secular civilization – the vast wealth that supposedly exists in modern usurious capitalism has served to exacerbate the gulf between the rich and poor, within and across nations. Consequently, the deeper question of what justice is, and how to move towards it, remains an intractable human problem.⁴¹ Hence, the issue of justice in this context remained as the problem of man, as confirmed by contemporary subjectivity-based philosophies. ‘*Adl* and ‘*adālah* are derived from the same linguistic root which is ‘*a d l*, alluding to justice and fairness. Some derivations of this root

terms. See, Ayat Adel Zakariyya Muhammad Hasan, *The Concept of Justice between Plato and Rawls*, MA Thesis, (Damanhour University: Faculty of Arts, Department of Philosophy, 2012), 9-12, 55-59.

⁴¹ Rabbani, H., *Justice and Human Values: An Analytical Study of the Theory of Justice in Contemporary Western Philosophy*, John Rawls-Paul Ricoeur, PhD Thesis, (Oran: Oran University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy, 2012), 98.

that illustrate its semantic connotations are listed below:

- ‘*Adala ashshay*’ ‘*adlan*’ (he made a thing straight or even).
- ‘*Adala abhshay*’ ‘*bishshay*’ (he made a thing to be like and to stand in the stead of another thing).
- ‘*T’adala*’ (something became intermediate in quantity, quality, or proportion).

‘*Adl*’ means fairness, that is, one takes his rights and perform his duties. ‘*Adl*’ also means beauty. It is the opposite of ugliness and the opposite of injustice. One of the most beautiful names of Allah is *Al-‘Adl*, which means the Just, the Impartial Judge and the Embodiment of Justice. One might say someone is “one of the people of *Ma’dalah*”, i.e., he is of the people of equity.⁴²

According to the *Philosophical Dictionary*, “justice” for philosophers means the ideal, natural, or positivist principle that defines the meaning of truth, and it requires its respect and application. If justice is related to something that matches the truth, it indicates equality and integrity, and if it is related to whoever did it, it indicates one of the original virtues (wisdom, courage, chastity, and justice). From an Islamic perspective, which views the transgression of the will of the Creator as injustice, justice is not *part* of virtue; rather, it is the *whole* of virtue.⁴³

It is clear from these linguistic and terminological philosophical definitions that most understandings link justice to truth and affirm that justice is a supreme value of the heritage of mankind, although there is no consensus about a holistic and cross-cutting specific definition of it in human thought. For instance, ancient Egypt was one of the greatest civilizations in the world, whose penal and civil laws were “highly sophisticated”:

“All its people were completely equal before the law as is the case nowadays. Among the laws in force was that the perjurer was sentenced to death, and the guilty was punished by his nose, ear or tongue being cut off, or by exile, hanging, stabbing, beheading, burning while

⁴² Ibn Manzur, M. I., *Lisān Al-‘Arab* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma’ārif, n.d.), 87-88.

⁴³ Saliba, J., *The Philosophical Dictionary* (Beirut: The Lebanese Book House, 1982), 126.

crucified, or embalming while alive which was the most severe form of punishment”.⁴⁴

These draconian punishments would be considered abhorrent to the modern observer, but they were viewed as essential to the pursuit of justice and virtue in ancient Egypt. Similarly, the sister-civilization of Mesopotamia placed justice at the centre of state policy, as in the prologue and epilogue of *The Code of Hammurabi*:

“I am Hammurabi, the king chosen by gods to act on their behalf to rule people, make them happy, spread justice among them and eradicate the evil when the strong overpowers the weak...

“I am Hammurabi, the just and perfect king... I am the one who received the laws from Shamash, the god of sun, truth, and justice.”⁴⁵

In the Qur’an, justice is mentioned not just rhetorically but also in practice; it extends to include human feelings. It is justice in action and conduct, justice with the strong, and justice with the weak. This can be achieved only when it is enhanced by strengthening the relationship of man with his Creator, fulfilling His rights, glory be to Him, to the fullest extent, and then fulfilling the rights of others under man’s obligations towards his Creator, the Exalted.

Building justice in society requires establishing justice in exchange and distribution. The Qur’an gave dozens of examples of the application of justice and its role in the stability and prosperity of nations and civilizations. Justice was talked about as one of the most important foundations during a very early period of the Islamic Da’wa in Mecca and is one of the main strictly enjoined commands that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), and all other Prophets (peace be upon them all) came with. These commands include worshipping Allah alone and associating nothing with Him in worship, which is the foundation of the message of Islam, and administering justice, which is the major pillar and basis of civilization after monotheism.

⁴⁴ Durant, W. *The Story of Civilization*, trans. Zaki Najib Mahmud, (Beirut: Dār Al-Jīl, 1988), 145.

⁴⁵ Dallo, B. A. *The Civilization of Egypt and Iraq*, (Beirut: Dār Al-Fārābī, 1989), 98.

Allah alludes to the connection between monotheism, economic justice, and peace in the following verses, alluding to the necessity for fairness and transparency in the market:

“And to Midian (We sent) their kinsman Shu’aib (as a Messenger). He said, “O my people! worship Allah, you have no one worthy of worship other than He. And give not short measure and (short) weight (today); I see you in (a state of) prosperity. But (for tomorrow) I fear lest there should befall you the punishment of a (dreadful) day that encompasses all (for destruction).” “And O my people! give true measure and full weight with equity and defraud not people of their possession and commit not inequity in the land as peace-breakers. The residue left to you by Allah (after your paying the dues of others) is better for you, if you are true believers. Yet I am not a guardian over you.”⁴⁶

Midian had a strong civilization, but they were polytheists and disbelievers. Moreover, injustice, underestimation, fraud, cheating, and corruption spread among them. Therefore, the call of Shu’aib (peace be upon him) focused on these matters with his people. First, he called them to monotheism, the core message of all prophets and messengers to their peoples. Monotheism and the rejection of polytheism is the primary duty and the highest demand placed upon mankind. For this purpose, Allah sent messengers, revealed books, and created all things. Then Shu’aib called them to reform their corrupted financial and economic practices, behave decently towards people, and abandon falsehood, cheating, injustice, and transgression in the land. He commanded them to be fair and just and give full measure and weight with equity. These are the ever-abiding righteous deeds that will benefit the servant on the day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the Worlds.

While primarily addressed to the people of Midian, as articulated by Shu’aib (peace be upon him), the above verses implicitly command all people of all times to observe fair weights (and economic transactions in general) with justice, and not skimp

⁴⁶ The Qur’an, *Surah Hūd* 11:84-86.

the balance. This point is frequently reiterated in the Qur'an, and all these commands and prohibitions have the same general meaning. The purpose of this is to demonstrate the importance and seriousness of this matter. The people of Shu'aib had a great civilization and trade, but they were commonly accustomed to transgressing the measure and weighing unfairly, so this case highlights the need to connect material prosperity to spiritual virtue (i.e., justice).

The Qur'an indicated that indulging in injustice and unfairness was one of the causes of the destruction of various nations and the demise of their civilizations. Allah says:

“That is a part of the important news of the (ruined) townships (of the past), We relate them to you. Some of these (cities) still exist while others have been mown down (and perished). We did no wrong to them (-their inhabitants) but they wronged themselves. And when their Lord's command (about their punishment) came to pass, their gods, whom they called upon apart from Allah, were of no avail to them. In fact, they added nothing to them except (leading them to) destruction. Such is the punishing grasp of your Lord when He takes to task the peoples of the townships (after bringing home to them the truth) while they are steeped in wrongdoings. Surely, painful is His punishing grasp (and) severe.”⁴⁷

Injustice, which is the antithesis of justice, brings doom, torment, and calamity to nations as well as individuals. When Allah Almighty seizes a town and its inhabitants because of their disbelief, injustice, and corruption, His punishment is surely painful, severe, and beyond all comparison. While some extent of wrongdoing is inherent in human life at the individual and social levels, the Islamic paradigm posits that this is a cause for repentance and striving to rectify oneself and one's community. When injustice becomes endemic and normalized in a society, and its people do not attempt to reform, the demise of that civilization is at hand, pending Allah's pleasure, as described in the following:

⁴⁷ The Qur'an, *Surah Hūd* 11:100-102.

“Why, then, were there not among the generations that preceded you persons possessed of excellence who would forbid the perpetration of evil in the land. But there were only a few of those (who acted righteously and) whom We had saved from among them. And (all others) who had committed wrong pursued that (wanton) ease and plenty they were afforded with (and this led to their rebellion and disobedience), and they were guilty. And your Lord is not the One Who would destroy the townships unjustly (simply for their disbelief) while the inhabitants thereof (live in peace and) set things right. Had your Lord (enforced) His will, He would have certainly made the whole of mankind one community, but (since He did not like to enforce His will upon people) they would not cease to differ. Different, however, is the case of those on whom your Lord has had mercy. Indeed, it is for (the bestowal of mercy) that He has created them; yet (this) word of your Lord, ‘Verily I will fill Hell with the (rebellious) jinn and people all together’, has perfectly come true.”⁴⁸

The existence of those who enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, set things in order, act justly, and judge fairly is a great reason for protecting nations and granting them sanctuary from destruction and general punishments. Building justice in society requires establishing justice in exchange and distribution, which is a defining characteristic of a civilization worthy of the name. This is chiefly manifested in the way in which the weak and vulnerable (particularly orphans and widows/ single women) are treated. Allah says, “O you who believe! do not consume your (one another’s) property amongst yourselves by unlawful means.”⁴⁹ The family, economic, social, and political legislation and provisions that were mentioned in the *Surahs* of the Qur’an are enough to preserve the dignity of the human being and to achieve practical justice.

⁴⁸ The Qur’an, *Surah Hūd* 11:116-119.

⁴⁹ The Qur’an, *Surah An-Nisaa* 4:29.

Aggression was a dominant tendency in the *Jāhilīyyah* (the period of ignorance before the rise of Islam), and people's relations at that time were based on aggression, devastating wars, and predatory tribalism (including alliances and partisanships), whether it was just or unjust, and right or wrong. In this context, Gustave Le Bon says: "The Arabian Peninsula, before the advent of Muhammad (ﷺ), was nothing but a vast and permanent field of war and the warlike nature was firmly rooted in the Arabs."⁵⁰ However, when the Qur'an was revealed to those souls, it eradicated that aggression and prohibited all its forms, as Allah does not love the aggressors.

Conclusion

This study explains some of the salient and important aspects of the norms of the rise and fall of civilizations, as stated in the Qur'an. It concluded that the Qur'an gave explicit attention to the urbanization of civilizations, narrated stories of previous peoples who reached high levels of advancement and urbanization, and underlined the major factors of their collapse. The latter comprises knowledge that is of no benefit, and injustice in all its forms and manifestations. Accordingly, the study confirmed that the establishment and stability of civilizations are primarily based on beneficial knowledge and justice, the lack of which is a major factor leading to the collapse and destruction of civilizations. Furthermore, beneficial knowledge and justice are based on monotheism (i.e., the rejection of polytheism), which protects nations and grants them sanctuary from transgression and arrogance. Finally, the study encourages scholars to research more deeply into the lives of previous peoples and nations mentioned in the Qur'an with the view of discovering more features and norms of their weakness and collapse to serve as lessons for present humanity.

The eternal message of the Qur'an emphasizes that a civilization is only as good as the status and treatment of its weakest members. At the current juncture in human history, wealth is disgustingly concentrated in the hands of a tiny gang of super-rich

⁵⁰ Al-Zuhaili, W, *Effects of War: A Comparative Jurisprudential Study* (Damascus: Dār Al-Fikr, 2013), 457, (Le Bon, 1974, cited in Al-Zuhaili, 2013).

oligarchs by a usurious system of peonage whereby the vast majority of the Children of Adam struggle to live a decent and honourable existence (including those above the materialist poverty lines). Contemporaneously, the amazing potentialities of modern material “civilization” are misappropriated to continue hyper-capitalist war-based economies and social engineering projects to benefit the usurious elites, robbing most people of their fundamental rights with which they were endowed by their Creator (including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness). It is only by heeding the warnings of previous nations that the current Pharaonic paradigm can be overcome by a return to the intrinsic disposition of mankind: the worship of the Creator, and the justice and mercy enjoined upon us all.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	ب	پ	پ	ز	ز	ز	ز	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	ب	ب	ب	ژ	—	—	ř	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	پ	پ	پ	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	ت	ت	ت	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h ¹	h ¹
ث	th	th	th	ص	ş	ş	ş	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḏ	ḏ	ž	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a ²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	—	—	—	—	—
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh	—	—	—	—	—
ڈ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	q	—	—	—	—	—
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	—	—	—	—	—

¹ – when not final

² – at in construct state

³ – (article) al - or l-

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form i)	iy (final form i)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
	و	uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	—	o or ö
	ا	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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