Huntington's Concept of Civilisation and Islamic Response

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ABSTRACT: *In the history of recent past, we see that the contemporary discourses at the end of Cold war are dominated by two propositions. Francis Fukuyama's End of History in which he offered a vision of success of liberal democracy as a final form of government. Samuel Huntington denounced it with the global conflict that would arise from Clash of Civilisations. The paradigm of Huntington however gained more substantial popularity due to many reasons, particularly, 9/11.*

The "Huntington's theory of clash of civilsiations" has virtually generated a conflict again in 21st century. In the summer of 1993 the journal of Foreign Affairs published an article entitled "The clash of civilsiations? This article according to the Foreign Affairs editors and Huntington started a debate in three years than any article they had published since the 1940's. The 'theory of clash of civilisations' sees Islam and West in clash with each other and the facts of clash are based on political strategies developed by the west and Islamic world. This clash among civilisations has hardly anything to do with the religion and culture itself. Once again religion is misused to prove a clash at International level, which is conceptually misunderstood by the many among us.

This work is an effort to differentiate the concept of 'civilisation' as understood by the Huntington against the many other scholars of Social science. In understanding the concept of 'civilisation', this work strives to point out the misunderstanding of the concept of 'civilisation' from the part of Huntington, due to which Huntington's concept of civilisation clashes in the name of religion.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term civilisation has been used in several related ways. The term is frequently referred to the material development of human cultures which are developed in science, technology etc. The civilisations based on material progress general emerge from the advancement of development of roads, agricultural activities, occupational specializations, better transport system, writing, art and architecture, political structures and finally religion[1]. The concept of civilisation is a complex one. It is one of the most difficult concepts to define in social sciences. Various disciplines like anthropology, sociology, philosophy etc. have attempted to define civilisation:

Webster's Dictionary defines civilisation as "The action or process of civilising or of being civilised, a developed or advanced state of human society". The verb "to civilise" according to the Webster's Dictionary means to bring out of a state of barbarism; to instruct in the arts of life; to enlighten; to refine and polish. This definition is inadequate enough to explore such a broad concept. It expels all the constituents which are generally agreed to exist in the concept of civilisation[2].

Fernand Braudel concerns about the difficulty of the definition that it would be pleasant to define the civilisation simply and precisely, as one defines a straight line but it is unfortunate that the vocabulary of social sciences scarcely permits decisive definitions. He says that the word developed in France in eighteenth- century and was formed from 'civilised' to 'civilise'. According to him in 1732 AD the word civilisation was a term used in jurisprudence for the act of justice. He further searches out that in 1752 AD Anne Robert Jacques Turgot gave it a modern meaning 'the process of being civilised[3].

The term civilisation has evolved from an era to another. Ibn Khaldoon, who is recognized as a founder of sociology, defined civilisation as:

Sophistication in luxury and the mastery of crafts used to advance it in various aspects such as cooking, clothes, decoration, architecture, and all social situations. Each of these requires skills and crafts to achieve it. They are specific and corollary to one to another, but

vary according to the variation of the inclinations of the soul towards the pleasures, delights and enjoyment of luxury that are determined by the decorum. Therefore, the cycle of civilisation related to monarchy is necessarily intertwined with the cycle of peasantry, since peasantry and monarchy are consubstantial with one another4.

Abul A'ala Maududi, a twentieth century Islamic thinker, discusses the concept of civilisation. Maududi along with many other Islamic Scholars have found religion capable of making a civilsiation. He mentions five elements which make the edifice of a civilisation, which include: 'concept of religion', 'aim of life', 'fundamental beliefs and thoughts', 'man making and 'collective System'. Every civilisation, says Maududi, depends on these five factors5.

The term also can be used in the less strict way, to mean same thing as 'culture'. Every society whether civilisation or not has a set of modes and customs or in broader sense a culture that makes it unique. For many scholars like Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee etc culture has a greater tendency of grouping all the contrasts of a large group, which assimilates them into a 'civilisation'. Spengler says that many civilisations are actually large cultural spheres containing many nations and regions. The civilisation in which someone lives is that person's broadest cultural identity6.

II. HUNTINGTON'S CONCEPT OF CIVILISATION

Samuel P. Huntington, a political scientist, made the concept of civilisation popular in 21st century. His description of civilisation is the concern of my work. He analyses the nature, identity and dynamics of civilisation in five propositions:

III. UNIVERSAL CIVILISATION

First, he discusses the distinction between 'civilisation in singular' and 'civilisations in plural'. The 'civilisations in plural' according to him has gained more prominence than the 'civilisation in singular'. He argues that the civilisation is not for few privileged peoples or world no longer accept one ideology or 'Ideal' of a civilisation and try to build their own civilisations7. According to him civilisation in singular or a universal civilisation cannot exist The challenge to 'Universal World Civilisation' is an interesting argument in the 21st century. George Modelski, professor of political science, says that the civilisation in singular expresses the commonalities of bulk of human population living on earth while as plural view express the differences between the civilisations. Huntington has discouraged the concept of existence of a 'Universal World Civilisation' but has briefly discussed it in last two pages of the book as a matter of interest of the future. While making a good analysis of singular civilisation he says that it questions whether an international order based on civilisations has the capacity to guard against world warfare. It puts learning at the heart of civilisational process8.

But for a singular civilisation the world must possess a component, base, on which to establish this ciivlisation. This base must be adoptive throughout the world. The human ideology is difficult to be set as a base because of prejudice. Hence we must look into the human collaboration and peace through the guidance of God not through the guidance of a human being. As the God of Universe is free from any interest and bias, humanity must accept His teachings as a base for the establishment of Singular Civilisation.

The component which may contribute to a universal civilisation according to the Huntington is 'Language' and 'Religion'. However, Language can never be a component of a universal civilisation, argues Huntington because of its complexities within a region or a culture. So far as religion is concerned Huntington virtually agrees with it but smells bias because he considers religion as one of the major components of 'clashes among civilisations' rather than establishment of a 'Universal Civilisation'. For example, Huntington says that Muhammad wins over Christianity, in the long run, through conversions and reproduction9. This is not a fair phrase; Muhammad wins because the role of religion is to guide the people on the legitimate path, not to play the game of winning or losing. From here Huntington misjudges his conceptual analysis of term 'civilisation'. If religion has the potential to clash, how come this component plays a pivotal role in making of civilsiations? Moreover the message of the torch bearers of the religion has always been universal free from language, caste, creed, geography etc. Jesus Christ and Muhammad (Peace be upon them) are the sound examples of Universal messengers.

Islam and Islamic civilisation poses a challenge of creating a universal civilisation. The characteristic is of its being a civilisation with a human, universal dimension, and not

associated with a particular geographic region, race or historical era. It rather concerns all peoples and nations and has echoes that reach different parts of the world. It is a civilisation which shields all human beings and whose fruits are generously yielded at hand's grasping for any one, indifferently. The Islamic civilisation is predicated on the idea that Man has precedence over the rest of Allah's creatures, that all human activities should lead to the happiness and welfare of Man and that any action intended to serve this goal is a God-blessed action, indeed a human action in the first place.

Allah says in the Quran, Surah Al- Hujrat [49:13]. :

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honored 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)".

 The verse explicitly shows that all of us have the same origin and through the process of righteousness we can reach back to our aim, the aim of creating peace in the world, alone, in the name of God.

IV.   CULTURE AND CIVILISATION

In the second proposition, the component on which Huntington has based his concept of civilisation is culture. Culture and civilisation for him is the overall 'way of life' of people. The key cultural elements on which he has tried to define civilisation is religion, values, beliefs, social structures and institutions. He assumes that people who share ethnicity and language but differ in religion may slaughter each other. According to Huntington, the religion is one of the main components to define civilisation as Islam to Islamic Civilisation, Confucianism to Chinese civilisation and Christianity to western .Besides this he has considered the definitions of various historians, anthropologists and sociologists like Emile Durkheim, Oswald Spengler, Immanuel Wallerstein and Fernand Braudel on the concept of civilisation, which makes his cultural theme strong in exploring the civilisation 10.

When we explore the term religion, it is very close to the term culture. The phrase used by the Huntington that the people who share ethnicity and language but differ in religion may slaughter each other, tunes unrealistic for the men of religiosity. Basil Pohlong in *Culture and Religion- A conceptual Study* makes an interesting argument by explaining that in Islamic society's religion plays a dominant role in determining the life of people. The culture of Islamic societies is based on religion. Their traditions, institutions, values and beliefs are shaped by religion. Religion for Islamic people is the complete 'way of life'. From here it is very difficult to assess what is then the difference between culture and religion. Zen Buddhism once upon a time acted as a molding factor of Japanese culture. In other words, in the traditional thought religion and culture are not different; they form what is known as 'unity'. Religion to humans is instinctive and inherent. It is basically the so called scientific age which replaced the term religion with culture. Anthropology separates humans from God and tries to link them with an object which man has created11.

Huntington has shown religion as a component of culture and culture is shown equivalent to civilisation. S. Abid Hussain in *The National Culture of India* says that when we narrow down the concept of religion then it becomes an important part of culture but in its wider sense religion coincides with, and goes beyond culture12.

It is also confusing to see how many cultures form one civilisation. Islamic civilisation, for example, is the blend of many cultures but one religion. Sometimes one culture contains so many religions as said by Basil Pohlong in *Culture and Religion- A conceptual Study* that khasi or Naga culture contains varieties of religions like Christianity, Tribal religion, Islam and so on. He adds that one must also think the role religion plays in theocratic societies like Pakistan13.

Besides that the number of religions in Britain and America, even though in minority are numerous, like Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Humanists, atheists etc. live in these societies and they are even from diverse cultures. One finds it very difficult to determine the component of judging any particular civilsiation.

This work is not to confuse the concept of culture. But it is very important to have a stand free from bigotry and also we should remain spread out while giving an idea so that it can fit to the analysis of every society. We cannot academically dominate one concept, developed by one set of scholars to judge societies.

Huntington has not ceased to explore the term culture in third proposition. He has shown so much love with term culture as:

The culture of a village in southern Italy may be different from that of a village in northern Italy, but both will share in common Italian culture that distinguishes them from German villages. European communities, in turn, will share cultural features that distinguish them from Arab or Chinese communities. Arabs, Chinese and Westerners, however, are not part of any broader cultural entity. They constitute civilisations. A civilisation is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species14.

With the use of very eloquent language, Samuel Huntington takes the term culture, something very personal within each society, and stretches it out in order to have it represent an entire society. Culture is not a term that can be generalized nor equally shared amongst many countries. I pay more stress on the idea that religion is as important as culture. The problem arises from the Huntington's phrase that civilisation is 'broadest cultural identity'. This broadest cultural identity deserves to be named as 'nationalism' rather than 'culture'.
Basil Pohlong says that one culture must have one religion at its core. The cultures which have more than one religion have problems in claiming one cultural identity. In short those who belong to the same religion share the same culture all together 15.
'Broadest cultural identity' seems again unrealistic in Islamic societies where highest factor of civilisational determination is religion, Islam.

There are civilisations, western civilisation, where culture stands for material prosperity or material advancements. In these civlisations cultural proposition of Huntington fits as long as culture for them means the material prosperity. There are also some societies which are spiritually sensitive, Islamic civilisation, Hindu civilisation etc, which may not fit to such an explanation. We develop concepts in social sciences with the consent of various opinions made by different scholars. Greek scholars, who had virtually no connection with the divine books, will look into the idea rationally. The story of being too much rational may contradict in east, which received the guidance of so many prophets.

V. Religion and Civilisation

Professor Whitehead defines religion as 'a system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended'. He also said that the 'ages of faith are the ages of rationalism16. Looking into this definition of religion it is clear that the aim of religion is to shape the both inner and outer life of a human being. The western scholars of religion like A.N Wilson, August Comte, Emile Durkheim, Bartend Russell, Edward Brunette Taylor, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Richard Dawkins had a different concept of religion. All these sociologists according the Ali Shariati' arrived at anti-religious conclusion while defining the religion17.
The doubt on the existence of God felt by the scholars like, Wilson and Dawkins might be the reason why culture with the meaning of material advancement is a major component of civilisational making in west. The eastern people have always considered the religion supreme which contradicts the western concept of religion.

Abul A'ala Maududi says; the height of a particular civilisation is experienced through the 'aim in life' of the individuals of that civilisation. The individual's purpose of life must remain the purpose of all individuals in that civilisation. Difference in the aim or purpose of life between the individuals of a civilisation will make an unsuccessful 'collective system' of that civilisation. And this purpose of life is best possible through the guidance of God only18.
If we consider the Islamic civilisation, it is the outcome of the interaction between the cultures of the peoples who converted to Islam either out of faith and conviction or out of allegiance and affiliation. It is the offspring of the cross-fertilization of the cultures and civilisations that existed in the regions brought under the umbrella of Islam during Islam's expansion, and the product of their melting in the pot of the principles, values and ideals that came with Islam as guidance for all the people on Earth"19.

A good Muslim will search for Islamic government, Islamic marriage, Islamic education and Islamic economy. Hence the base and ideal for a Muslim from whatever culture he belongs is religion, Islam.

Huntington continues to explore the concept of civilisations in his fourth and fifth propositions. He discusses about the emergence, development and decline of civilisations in the forth proposition. He makes a good point that political systems maintain the identity of

people for a short duration but civilisation is the 'longest story' of all. The survival of the 'longest story' must be because of some primary ideas which the people contain and maintain for generations20. Again the component or the primary idea which keeps the longevity of that civilisation is not the eating stuff, dress code, buildings, language etc. but it has to be the religion.

We question that material advancements, howsoever, sophisticated cannot be core elements of making a civilisation. In Islam religion certainly is a core element which is missing in western civilisation. This does not mean Civilisations should forget prospering materially. But it is true morality and religion plays a sound role in making people civilized than material profusion. Christopher Dawson says in his book Religion and the *Rise of Western Culture* that the important subject of interaction of culture and religion in the life of western society has been left out and almost forgotten. Dawson says that we must appreciate the power of religion as being the only tool which remained unaffected by the collapse of civilisation21.

The power which religion has in making a civilisation is found very less in other components of civilisation. The most civilisations are religious and most civilised men are also religious. The impact the world witnesses due to Jesus Christ and Muhammad (Peace be upon them) is far stronger than the impact of technology or Industrial Revolution. We should not therefore clash in the name of civilsiations, the edifice of which is religion.

While in the fifth proposition Huntington says that civilisation is not a political but a cultural entity. However, he finds some of the civilisations which contain one political unit, like Japan and even China22. Ibn Khaldoon explains the political nature of civilisations by holding that monarchy and statehood are the ultimate expression of nationalism and that civilisation is the ultimate expression of rural life. Every human entity be it peasantry, civilisation, monarchy or the folk, has a limited lifetime like any of its individual constituents. This is what confirms the theory of the rise and fall of civilisations which Ibn Khaldoon had been the first to develop, well before European philosophers and thinkers. Only late in the twentieth century, had the British historian Arnold Toynbee expounded and reformulated this theory in a modern way to become an axiom in the field of history philosophy 23.

The last proposition also discusses about the major world civilisations, which according to the Huntington scholars have identified and those exist in the modern world. World Historians and Sociologists like, William H. Mc Neil, Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Philip Bagby, Fernand Braudel, Melko and Carroll Quigley have discussed some eight or nine highly developed cultures or civilisations out of which Huntington has purposefully chosen six civilisations. They include Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Western, Latin American and possibly, African civilisation 24.

Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Director General of the 'Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization' (ISESCO) says that if we consider the basic cultural elements which determine a civilisation, six major contemporary civilisations can be identified: the Islamic civilisation, Western civilisation, Indian civilisation (Hindu), Chinese civilisation (named as Sinic by Huntington), Japanese civilisation and Latin-American civilisation. Each of these civilisations has its distinctive features and specificities that differentiate it from other civilisations in many respects. Civilisations may share certain aspects and traits, which are part of the human nature that is prone to behave according to the sound disposition bequeathed by Allah Almighty 25.

VI. CONCLUSION

Every civilisation is underpinned by general principles, which stem from religious creeds or positive philosophies. No matter how numerous creeds and philosophies are, the distinctive characteristics of a civilisation are determined by the well-entrenched creeds in the hearts and minds of people and the most influential in the public life, to the extent that civilisation becomes tainted and associated with them. This association is all the more sound when these underpinnings are sound in themselves, as is the case with the Islamic civilisation.

The major civilisations in the history of humanity differ from one another depending on their stance on material and spiritual life. There are in fact civilisations where materialism is overwhelming, others which favor the spiritual life and finally those which strike a fair balance between the materialistic and the spiritual sides26.

One must agree that there lies a basic difference in the concept of civilisation as understood by the scholars. The main difference lies in the purpose of life which differs and varies from one group to another

The prediction of 'clash' has taken such a critical place that it is obligatory for the scholars to ponder about this concept in a right perspective. There are differences between Islamic civilisation and western civilisation mainly because Huntington while judging the culture and religion as major components of civilisational making finds them clashing with Islamic civilisation. This is not true about the western civilisation because the major component in their civilisational making is the culture made up of material advancement not religion.

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