



## Post-Modernity and Crisis of Identity

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### Abstract:

Islamic Civilization is the fountain of modern civilization, the creator of the modern world and the propagator towards the evolution of science. Are we, the Muslims, ready to enter the era of post-modernity and pluralism or our thought is still traditional? How much modern the Muslim world has become before it may enter the post-modernity? What is our identity? Is there any challenge that our identity faces by welcoming post-modernity? Why are we unable to be in front of the world what we claim we are? This paper will define post-modernity, its characteristics, prerequisites and requirements, and its effects, if any, on the Muslims' identity. Also the paper will discuss the role of media in determining how much it is affected by post-modernity and consequently how much it has affected our true identity. The paper will conclude that the end part of this Ummat can only be reformed except with which its first part was reformed.

**Key words:** Post-Modernity, Identity crisis, Modern civilization.

### Introduction:

Man as appointed by Allah, His vicegerent on earth<sup>1</sup> was given great qualities to explore the universe through the study of nature. The declaration made by Allah that He has subjugated everything in the universe for man<sup>2</sup>, gives him a great incentive to explore His creation and utilize it for the betterment of humanity<sup>3</sup>.

It is a well-known fact that the foundation of modern science on the basis of observation and experimental method, was laid by the Muslim scientists.<sup>4</sup> Starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> century the Muslim scientists flourished and shined on the world for almost 300 years. They learnt the works of their predecessors and within a very short period of time systematized the knowledge acquired previously and began making significance advances of such fundamental nature that

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the phenomenal development of the modern era could not have been possible without the contributions made by them.<sup>5</sup>

The Muslim scientists would not believe in authoritarianism in science. They would accept the scientific conclusions of others subject to their experimental verification, and would also make new observations and experiments leading to new discoveries. The following quotation from Kitaāb al-Tafhīm of al-Bīrunī throws light on the point:

“And I have truly done what everyone is bound to do in respect of any particular science, that is, to accept gratefully the original contributions of his predecessors, to correct fearlessly the errors that come to his notice, and to preserve that what he himself discovers, and to leave it as a record for the future generations that are to follow him in time”<sup>6</sup>.

In modern times, the contribution of Muslim Civilization and Culture to the development of science hardly received the measure of recognition it deserves.<sup>7</sup> A recently published *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*<sup>8</sup> lists at least 101 scientists who flourished in the sunshine of Islamic Civilization.<sup>9</sup>

### **Post-modernity and its characteristics:**

The modern period has surpassed every other period in the matter of material progress and scientific explorations. But with all that, the experts in the field of Sociology, Psychology and Medicine are amazed at the alarming increase in the number of neurotics and those suffering from other nervous disorders. An atmosphere of fear and distraction pervades the whole world, in which the future of humanity appears dark, particularly the architects of this new civilization find themselves ill-at-ease and bereft of all pleasure even in the super-abundance of social amenities and a life of ease and luxury. The utopia or at least the golden period that the learned men and thinkers of the nineteenth century had been contemplating on the basis of the scientific inventions and explorations, had soon become a confused dream.<sup>10</sup>

It appears that the greater the progress of the means at man's disposal, the more his restlessness and anxiety. The countries with a very high standard of living have a greater percentage of psychological affections than in other countries not so privileged.<sup>11</sup>

**Postmodernism Defined:**

Before defining postmodernism we should try to define modernism. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term as ‘modern view(s) or method(s), especially tendency in matters of religious beliefs to subordinate tradition to harmony with modern thought’.

Modernism has come to mean the most recent phase of world history marked by the belief in science, planning, secularism and progress. The desire for symmetry and order, balance and authority has also characterized it. The period is noted for its confidence in the future, a conviction that Utopia is attainable, that there is a natural world order which is possible. The machine, gigantic industrial projects, steel, iron and electricity – all were thought to be at the disposal of humanity to achieve this objective. The drive towards industrialization and reliance on the physical, created an ideology which emphasized materialism as a way of life.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless doubts about modernism are expressed early by modernist writers like James Joyce and K.H. Lawrence. The critique of notions such as total ‘progress’ and those which generated them, like the Enlightenment, was already under way before the advent of postmodernist thinking (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979).<sup>13</sup>

Anthony Giddens poses a central, though little raised, question in relation to modernism: ‘Is modernity a Western project?’ (1990: 174). His blunt answer is ‘Yes’ (ibid: 175).<sup>14</sup>

The contemporary formulation of postmodernism as a distinct phase succeeding modernism is rooted in and explained by the recent history of the West which is at core of the dominant global civilization of our times. Our definition of this civilization is cultural/political and not geographical.<sup>15</sup>

The term ‘postmodernism’ has been around for some time. Malcolm Bradbury points out that over the decades the term has come to mean different things to different people:

The term ‘Postmodernism’ in the West is also becoming obsolete now. Scholars are already looking beyond postmodernism with titles like *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (H. Smith 1989). Jencks has declared this term dead and proclaimed in its place a new phrase, ‘The New Modernism’ (Jencks 1990).<sup>16</sup>

For others it is the Late Modern Age or High Modernity (the main features of which are radicalizing and globalizing – Giddens 1991: 243).<sup>17</sup>

However, ‘despite the problems with the term itself – its relation to modernism, the meaning of “post”, the periodization implied by the reference to modernism, and its co-opting of the modernism it apparently seeks to transgress – it has nevertheless entered the language, although what it designates is still very much at issue’ (A. Lee 1900:x).<sup>18</sup>

### **Characteristics of Post-modernity:**

The term ‘Postmodernism’ is difficult to define without any ambiguity. Lyotard, in *The Post-Modern Conditions*, characterizes the postmodern as possessing an ‘incredulity toward met narratives’ (1984: xxii). It is ‘an enigmatic and post-modernity’ (Foucault 1984: 39). For some it is more than merely ‘troubling’ and ‘gentle’ in its apocalyptic impact. It is panic culture: *The Postmodern Scene* evokes, and then secretes the fin-de-millennium mood of contemporary culture. It is a panic book: panic sex, panic art, panic ideology, panic bodies, panic noise, and panic theory’ (Kroker and Cook 1988: i).<sup>19</sup>

Akbar S. Ahmed tries to identify some features of post-modernism. He thinks that the use of the term reflects the following features:<sup>20</sup>

- 1- To approach an understanding of the postmodernist age is to presuppose a questioning of, a loss of faith in the project of modernity; a spirit of pluralism; a heightened skepticism of traditional orthodoxies; and finally a rejection of a view of the world as a universal totality, of the expectation of final solutions and complete answers. The postmodernist condition corresponds to the collage of images and ideas that represents it – ironic, iconoclastic and free-floating. It declares its scope as universal; it embraces high- and low-brow, the serious and the frivolous with equal zeal. For postmodernists, ideology, Marxist or Buddhist, is just one brand of many available in the shopping mall.
- 2- Postmodernism coexists and coincides with the age of media; in many profound ways the media are the central, dynamic and the defining feature of postmodernism. The media entertain, instruct, educate, and pervert ceaselessly and with endless variety.

- 3- The connection between postmodernism and ethno-religious revivalism - or fundamentalism - needs to be explored by social and political scientists. Postmodernists are better philosophers than they are anthropologists. While noting the fragmentation of social and political ideas and shifts in thought, postmodernists fail to link this process with the revival of ethnicity and religious fundamentalism. (How this revivalism is shaped by media images is discussed later). Where nothing is sacred, every belief becomes revisable. Thus fundamentalism is the attempt to resolve how to live in a world of radical doubt. It is a dialogue with the times, a response to it. The unsettling contradictions and tensions that are noted in the major world religions are a result of the transnational moves towards unity; the question of the multiple interpretation of religion is thus also raised. In fact, an argument can be made that ethno-religious revivalism is both cause and effect of postmodernism.<sup>21</sup>
- 4- The continuity with the past remains a strong feature of postmodernism. The umbilical cord is not cut although it threatens sometimes to suffocate the baby. Perhaps the continuity with the past is strongest in postmodernist literature. Scholars conclude that there is much more continuity than difference between the broad history of modernism and the movement called postmodernism. However the continuities with the past involve irony and wit (Kermode 1988); 'And its response to reality is to treat it as unreal' (ibid.: 130; also see A. Lee 1990: 141).<sup>22</sup>
- 5- Because large parts of the population live in urban areas and a larger part still are influenced by ideas originating from these areas, the metropolis becomes central to postmodernism (Eco 1986; Harvey 1989a and 1989b; Jencks 1984 and 1990; Raban 1974; Sennett 1991; Wilson 1991).<sup>23</sup>

Cities, unlike villages and small towns are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them. (Raban 1974: 9-10).<sup>24</sup>

In certain parts of some Muslim cities, like Karachi and Cairo, there is ample evidence to suggest that the urban terror has begun. Over-crowding, lack of civic amenities, collapse of law and order, endemic corruption and ethnic and sectarian violence create a general sense of despair and anarchy.<sup>25</sup>

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- 6- There is a class element in postmodernism, and democracy is a pre-condition for it to flourish. The architects, dramatists, social scientists, writers, those who provide the dynamics of a modern city, are at the core of postmodernism. Through the media their ideas are widely spread. The power of this class is based on knowledge and communication; it is, in bourdieu's phrase, their 'cultural capital'. Postmodernism may thus be seen as essentially, though not exclusively, a middle-class phenomenon (See Lash 1990: 251).<sup>26</sup>

With democratization, demotic impulses shape the age. And democracy took the long time coming. Starting in the last century it was a reluctant giving by the ruling classes of the vote, firstly to all white men, irrespective of birth, then, more reluctantly, to women and finally – and this is an ongoing struggle – to the traditionally oppressed groups like blacks. It is the culmination of the celebrities, for the vulgarization that is so apparent in the mass media.<sup>27</sup>

### **Western Civilization Meets Islamic Civilization:**

The modern western civilization came into existence from contact of the west with the Islamic Civilization and those of its Arabian centers established in Spain and other Muslim countries.<sup>28</sup>

The agencies through which the scientific knowledge passed from the Muslim world to Europe were the following:

1. Towns
2. Persons
3. Crusades
4. Medical schools.<sup>29</sup>

When the Western people acquired the scientific knowledge from the Muslims, they faced some serious challenges from the church, as this new knowledge opposed the knowledge and teachings of the church. Hence a long battle started between the church and science. As church was powerful, the Christian scientists faced imprisonment, inquisitions, verdicts of heresy and all types of persecutions.

When this renaissance movement of the west could stand on its feet it had the clear stamp of two things: love of the Greek philosophy, formed with purely materialistic and idolatrous concepts, and disgust of religion and animosity of the religious people.<sup>30</sup>

This war between the church and science in the west is won by the science. The church has lost its subjects and now trying in vain to

attract the people with different ways and styles. But on the other hand the anti-religious west now is realizing its moral and spiritual bankruptcy and most of the people are turning their eyes towards the East with the hope that they might help.

Dr. Mustafa Siba'I narrates a personal experience with a convert to Islam. He says:

Once a fresh convert to Islam, Mr. Abu Bakr, an orientalist of British extraction, told me the story of his embracing Islam. He had been a professor of English language in Fuad University, and it was there that he embraced the religion of peace. He is at present the secretary of the Eastern section of the National Library, London. Explaining the reasons behind his opting for Islam, he said that the western civilization has trampled under feet, both the human dignity and beauty of human's life. I said to him, "Where the loss of human dignity is concerned, I won't question your opinion about it, but how did you come to have that opinion about beauty, whereas the western people have a very high opinion of the western civilization as regards beauty of natural scenery, the beauty of dress, the beauty of the mode of living and that of the habitation, beauty of the female sex- in short there is consideration of every type of aesthetic taste in it." He said in reply "This civilization has destroyed the beauty of the soul and intuition and morals."<sup>31</sup>

### **Uniqueness of Islamic Civilization:**

Islam is the most misunderstood religion. It has been misunderstood not only by its historical rivals such as Hindus, Christians and Jews, but by some of its own followers.

Christianity and Judaism have painted Islam and its Prophet as propagating the faith with the Qur'an in one hand and the sword in the other, conveniently forgetting the fact that the Christian nations of Europe conquered half of the world and colonized North and South Americas, Australia, and New Zealand with the Bible in one hand and the gun in the other.

Some of Islam's own followers, particularly of the Indo-Pak subcontinent, have identified and equated Islam with medieval tradition, orthodoxy, oriental passivity and inaction.<sup>32</sup>

Islam is an active, dynamic, positive and modern way of life. There has been no *Ummah* in the history of the world which has not made additions to the pages of the history of civilization. However

what distinguishes one civilization from another is the strength of the foundations on which these civilizations have been founded. Islam does not allow its followers to be despair or disappointed regardless how serious or severe the circumstances are. Qur'an says: "O my servants, who have transgressed against themselves! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: verily Allah forgives all sins. Truly He is Oft-Forgiving, Most-Merciful."<sup>33</sup> Qur'an also states: "Be active and work, Allah will see your work and so will His Messenger and the believers. And you will be brought back to the All-Knower of unseen and the seen. Then He will inform you of what you used to do."<sup>34</sup>

Allama Iqbal says in his poetry:

اپنی امت پر قیاس اقامہ فریب کر  
خاص ہے ترکیب میں قوم رسول ہاشمی

"Do not compare your *Ummat* with the European nations; The *Ummat* of the Hashimite Messenger is special in its ingredients."<sup>35</sup>

The Islamic Civilization is unique among the other civilizations of the world in the following characteristics:

- 1- Islamic Civilization is based on the foundation of believing in the oneness of Allah, the only true and sovereign God.

"And verily We have sent among every *Ummat* a Messenger, proclaiming: Worship Allah alone and avoid all false deities. Then of them were some whom Allah guided and of them were some upon whom the straying was justified. So travel through the land and see what was the end of those who denied the truth."<sup>36</sup>

"The sovereignty belongs to Allah alone. He has commanded that you worship none but Him, that is the straight religion, but most people know not."<sup>37</sup>

- 2- Islamic Civilization is unique in calling towards Equality of Human Race. The hidden factor working behind this equality is again the belief in the oneness of God. If we believe that our Creator is one God and we are all His servants, then based on this concept we (the entire humanity) are equal. The same message was inculcated by the Prophet when he started his farewell address in the valley of Arafat:

"O people listen to me carefully, for you will not be able see me next year. O people! Your Lord is one, as your father is one. You are all children of Adam and Adam was created from dust. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab is superior to an



Arab. No white man is superior to a black man, nor a black man is superior to a white man except on the basis of piety.<sup>38</sup> Then the Prophet recited this verse of Sura al-Hujurat: “O people! We have created you from one male and one female, and then We spread you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily the most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most pious among you.”<sup>39</sup>

- 3- Islamic Civilization has given first priority to the moral principles in its entire system and all its activities. Application of moral principles has always been kept in view in governance, learning and arts, legislation, peace and war, economy and familial affairs. Rather the height of perfection and excellence attained by the Islamic Civilization in this behalf has never been reached by any old or new civilization, and traces and impressions left by this civilization in this connection are marvelous.<sup>40</sup>

The Prophet of Islam has emphasized on morality and considered it his mission by saying:

“I have been sent to perfect the noble manners.”<sup>41</sup>

“I guarantee... a house in the upper part of Paradise for a man who made his character good.”<sup>42</sup>

- 4- Islamic Civilization has deep faith in learning and seeking knowledge. It considers ignorance its greatest enemy. Ignorance in other words is the absence of Islam. Hence the time before Islam is called the time of ignorance. The holy Qur’an wants to see a Muslim, learned, educated, reflecting and pondering over the Signs of his/her Lord. It starts everything even the faith tenets from knowledge.

“So know that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah.”<sup>43</sup>

The holy Qur’an addresses the intellect, the reason and logic. It never calls to blind faith.

“And the faithful servants of the Most Gracious are also those believers who, when reminded of the verses of their Lord, fall not deaf and blind thereat.”<sup>44</sup>

“And among His Signs is this, that He created you from dust, and then – behold you are human beings scattered. And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put affection and mercy.

Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect. And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge. And among His Signs is your sleep by night and by day and your seeking of His Bounty. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who listen. And among His Signs is that He shows you the lightning, for fear and for hope, and He sends down water from the sky, and therewith revives the earth after its death. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who understand.”<sup>45</sup>

From this point of view the Islamic Civilization stands out among other civilizations.

- 5- Islamic Civilization is unique in the sense that it does not allow the separation between the faith and state. Faith is not a personal matter in Islamic Civilization. The definition of caliph (Khalifa) is the one who takes care of both political and religious affairs of the subjects. It is a full package; either take it or leave it in its entirety. You cannot be picky in Islamic Civilization.

The holy Qur’an while condemning the Jews said to them:

“Do you believe in a part of the Scripture and reject the rest?”<sup>46</sup>

While addressing the Muslims Allah said:

“O believers! Enter perfectly in Islam and follow not the footsteps of Satan. Verily he is to you a plain enemy.”<sup>47</sup>

Allama Iqbal says:

جلال بادشاہی کی جمہوری تمنا ہے  
جدا ہو دین سیاست تو رہ جاتی ہے چنگیزی

Jalal e Padshahi ho ke Jamhoori Tamasha ho,  
Juda ho Deen siyosat se to reh jati he changezi”<sup>48</sup>

“Whether it is the awe of an emperor or the play of Democracy, if the Religion is separated from the politics then it is only the cruelty that is left behind”.

- 6- Islamic Civilization is unique in its marvelous religious tolerance which has never been witnessed in a civilization based on the religious foundation.

In Dr. Mutafa Siba’I’s words:

It is possible for one not reposing faith in God and any known (revealed) faith, to regard all religions equally respectable and treat its followers on an equal footing. But the followers of a faith

who is convinced that his faith is true and his creed is the truest and most accurate, and then he is afforded a chance of lifting the sword, conquering lands, and ruling and sitting in judgment over them, and even then his faith and belief do not allow him to be tyrant in his rule, to pervert the administration of justice and to compel people to enter the fold of his own faith, such a person would really be regarded a strange creation. Therefore how amazing and isolated would be the situation that there was an entire civilization founded on religious basis and built on these principles, but in spite of all that it might have adopted the behavior of utmost tolerance, justice and equity, and humanity.<sup>49</sup>

The years 1556-1707, i.e., Akbar to Aurangzeb observed the Muslim empire and influence attain its greatest extent and importance, and that was the time when the most extensive hybridization of local cultures and religion took place in the Subcontinent.

Conversion to Islam by use of force is a controversial issue, always being discussed. It was not the failure on the part of the Muslim rulers to spread Islam in the Subcontinent, as stated by Murray T. Titus<sup>50</sup>, rather it was the greatness of the Muslim rulers who did not force Islam on Hindus and other faith groups. They were bound by the following Qur'anic injunction: "There is no forceful conversion into the religion of Islam"<sup>51</sup>

Based on these characteristics of Islamic Civilization, a Muslim's identity maybe determined as the one who:

- Is deeply founded in believing in the oneness of Allah, the only true and sovereign God.
  - Is unique in calling towards Equality of Human Race.
  - Gives first priority to the moral principles in his/her entire system of life and all his/her activities.
  - Has deep faith in learning and seeking knowledge. It considers ignorance its greatest enemy.
  - Does not consider Faith a personal matter.
  - Is unique in religious tolerance which has never been witnessed in a civilization based on the religious foundation.
  - Has two fundamental sources of law that no other member of any civilization whatsoever has; the authentic Word of God in its original form and the authentic and detailed practical
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demonstration of that revelation by the Prophet of God, i.e., the Sunnah.

### **Impact of Modernity over the Muslims' Identity:**

Colonial rule for Muslims was an unmitigated disaster. No arguments about Europe providing railways and the telegraph, or maintaining law and order, can conceal or assuage this fact. Colonization affected the Islamic ideal by contorting and smothering it. During the colonial century Muslims would wage a desperate battle to salvage the ideal. The costs could be heavy, and Muslims are still paying them.<sup>52</sup>

Europe – England, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy – insatiably swallowed Muslim lands; Russia displayed a similar appetite for the Muslim Central Asian states. One by one, kingdoms and states, large and petty, fell. The Europeans were able to subjugate what had been established and complex civilizations. Colonial rule paralyzed Muslim societies, congealed thought and froze their history. European notions of race and class entered and became part of Muslim society. Worse, the colonial period destroyed Muslim confidence, creating in them and of them an image of childlike helplessness.<sup>53</sup>

Muslims learned how to divide and rule on the basis of different classes of the people. The precious quality of considering the entire humanity equal started diminishing.

The most important and dangerous impact that the colonial system left upon the Muslim minds was the secular way of thinking. Colonialists could never prolong their rule over the Muslim world with keeping the Islamic schools and universities intact. They had to confiscate the vast lands that were possessed by these schools and universities to put an end to this system of education. Muslims had to be cut off from their glorious past. The schools and colleges established by the colonialists were to prepare the public servants loyal to the colonial interests.<sup>54</sup>

Under 'Freedom of thought and emotions' a Muslim mind is confused between permissible and prohibited. The meaning of "Verily the prayer prevents from sins of every kind,"<sup>55</sup> has become ambiguous.

One of the idols imported by modernity and the Muslims worshipped it was nationalism. It spoiled the true concept of loyalty

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towards the Creator. Many Muslims and some scholars also, started thinking that the foundation of Islamic Ideology is based on the motherland. Dr. Iqbal criticized this imported idol in these words:

ان تازہ جہانوں میں ہر سب سے وطن ہے  
جو پیریں اس کا ہے ہندسب کا کفن ہے

(In taza khudaun mn bara sb se watan he  
Jo perahan is ka he wo mazhab ka kafan he)<sup>56</sup>

Another idol, imported by modernity to the Islamic world, that also has to be worshipped, is democracy. It confused the Muslim mind all over the world in his understanding of Islamic political system. The holy Qur'an condemned democracy. "Say: Not equal are the evil and the good, even though the abundance of the evil may please you."<sup>57</sup>

Dr. Iqbal puts it this way:

جمہوریت اک طرز حکومت ہے کہ جس میں  
بندوں کو گنا کرتے ہیں، تو لانا نہیں کرتے!

(Jumhooriat ik tarz e hakoomat he ke jis mn  
Bandon ko gina karte hn tola nhe karte)<sup>58</sup>

"Democracy is a system of government in which the people are counted not weighed".

The Islamic system of consultancy 'Shura' that leads to the institution of Khilafat is the ideal political system that Islam gave to humanity.<sup>59</sup>

### **Role of Media in Changing the Muslims' identity:**

Nothing in history has threatened Muslims like the Western media. The Western media are ever present, never resting and never allowing respite. The powerful media offensive is compounded for Muslims: they appear not to have the capacity to defend themselves. Worse; they appear unable even to comprehend the nature and objectives of the onslaught.<sup>60</sup>

How media was successful in corrupting the pure nature of Muslims' identity could be understood from the following realities:

- 1- Media, especially Western media is like a Hindu *Banya*, trader, who will say Ram Ram at your face but will kill you with his hidden knife. So it teaches the viewers in general and Muslims in particular that no one is worthy of befriending; no one should be

trusted, robbing them from the sentiments of Islamic brotherhood and feelings of sincerity toward the entire family of God.

- 2- Media left strong impression on the hearts of the Muslims that the best people in the world are the white people, then the colored ones and then the worst are the blacks. In this way it faded away the strong belief of human equality among the Muslims.
- 3- The spread of indecency, immorality, pornography and sexuality are the priority number one of the Western media. These scenes are repeated so frequently that after a while they look 'normal', while the holy Qur'an has clearly stated "Verily those who like to spread indecency among the believers will taste a painful torment in this world and in the Hereafter".<sup>61</sup>
- 4- Media can be truly called the agent of Satan as it performs his job; the presenting of falsehood in the form of virtue. This was actually what Satan said to Allah when Allah gave him respite: "I will indeed adorn the path of error for them (mankind) on the earth and I will mislead them all, except Your chosen servants among them."<sup>62</sup>
- 5- Media will be very keen to constantly check your level of spirituality. If by chance or mistake you come across a religious program that has elevated you spiritually, media will try successfully to undo that effect. This may require to stop the program for a break and show you a half naked woman marketing a brand of tea, shampoo or mobile phone.

### **Who Am I?**

Who am I, is a genuine question, everyone should ask him/herself. There are three major philosophical schools that discuss our identity as human beings. First school says that man is body alone. Because it is only the body that can be physically conceived. Soul, spirit, ego and mind are all hypothesis.

Second school holds the opinion that man is soul and soul alone. Matter is just a shadow and illusion. Nirwana and *Rahbaniyyat* are the products of this school.

The third school combines both of the above extremist schools and says that man is both body and soul. Plato and Descartes contributed to this school. This school of philosophy has been quite

popular but the real crisis of identity starts here. If I am both soul and body then how much of soul and how much of body?<sup>63</sup>

I was attending an inter-faith conference in Jacksonville, Florida (USA) where many priests, Rabbis, monks and pundits were participating. I was representing the Muslims. A Native American faith leader (Red Indian) said in his speech that his grandfather told him about their ancient belief about the soul and its relationship to the body. He said: ‘Son! There is a wolf inside you. He will constantly fight with you. You have to win this fight. If you don’t then he will turn you into a wolf like himself.

I think the holy Qur’an has a better answer to this question. It tells us about the three kinds of human soul. The soul that is self-reproaching,<sup>64</sup> the soul inclined to evil,<sup>65</sup> and the soul that is at peace and tranquility.<sup>66</sup>

The first kind of soul has angelic qualities. It keeps on trying to stop the person from committing wrong deeds. We may call it the voice of conscience that comes out from deep inside of a human being. The second kind of soul has animalistic qualities. It always commands the human being to commit wrong deeds. It could be conveniently called the agent of Satan. Now the fight between these two forces is real as told by the Red Indian chief. Even the holy Prophet (SWA) has called these two forces a real angel and a real *Shaitan* from among the Jin,<sup>67</sup> both trying their best to convince the human being to walk on ‘his way’. If the soul inclined to evil wins then it produces an animal like human being who seeks pleasure in killing and robbing others. And if the soul that is self-reproaching wins then it produces an angel like human being who seeks pleasure in serving the family of God. This human being possesses a balanced personality, a content and at peace personality that is mentioned as ‘*al-Nafs al-Mutma’innah*’, the soul that is at peace and tranquility.

But according to my mind the fight inside must continue. It must not stop, as long as we are human beings. We need to win the fight; not get rid of the enemy. Some companions of the Prophet (SAW) once asked him if they could get castrated and the Prophet (SAW) strongly prohibited that,<sup>68</sup> or some companions complained to the Prophet that they do not feel the same spiritual elevation when they are with their families or busy in their businesses as they feel when in his company. The Prophet told them that it is not required to

have that high spirituality all the time; otherwise the angels will be shaking hands with them in the streets.<sup>69</sup>

The Prophet (SAW) has put it like this: “All the human beings commit sins, and the best of them are those who repent.”<sup>70</sup> Allah the Almighty has also pointed towards this inner fight and human shortcomings based on this struggle.

“And there are others who have acknowledged their sins; they have mixed a deed that was righteous with another that was evil. Perhaps Allah will turn unto them in forgiveness. Surely, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”<sup>71</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Who are we? Why are we here? Where are we going to? These are all very genuinely true questions that we ask ourselves. We are Muslims. When Allah created our father He blew some of His own spirit in him.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps that is why when we remember Allah or call upon Him, our hearts find rest and peace in His remembrance.<sup>73</sup> Then Allah made us His representatives on earth. Allah has sent us to this earth for a specific period<sup>74</sup> and assigned some duties to us.<sup>75</sup> We are to perform those duties, regardless of the results.<sup>76</sup> Our real home is *Jannat*, where our parents lived, got some training from Allah, then got promoted and sent to this earth as His vicegerent. At the end we will be going back home.<sup>77</sup>

We need to know our ‘self’, its origin, and the way back to our ‘Real Home’, (Bāp ka Ghar) to have better understanding of our identity.



## References

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- 3 See Al-Qur'an, 13:17.
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- 5 Ibid. p v.
- 6 Iran Society, *Al-Bīrūnī*, (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1551), p 1.
- 7 Muhammad Saud, *Islam and Evolution of Science*, (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1994), p vi.
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- 9 Muhammad Saud, *Islam and Evolution of Science*, (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1994), p vi.
- 10 Dr. Mustafa Siba'I, *Some Glittering Aspects of The Islamic Civilization* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1984), p xiii.
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- 12 Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992), p 6,7.
- 13 Ibid, p 7.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992), p 9.
- 16 Ibid. p 10.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
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- 21 Ibid, p 13.
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- 27 Ibid, p 24.

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- 31 Mustafa Siba'I, Dr. *Some Glittering Aspects of The Islamic Civilization* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1984), pp xxiii-xxiv.
- 32 Jamil Wasti, syed. *Islam in the Modern Idiom and Other Essays* (Karachi: Ghazanfar Academy, 1996), p 4.
- 33 Al-Qur'an, 39:53.
- 34 Al-Qur'an, 9:105.
- 35 Muhammad Iqbal, *Dr. Kulliyat e Iqbal* (Lahore: Maktaba Jamal, 2009), p 288.
- 36 Al-Qur'an, 16: 36.
- 37 Al-Qur'an, 12: 40.
- 38 See the whole Address of Farewell Hajj in *Sahih Bukhari*, Book of Hajj, Sermon in the days of Mina, Hadith No. 1739, 2nd. Ed. (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 1999).
- 39 Al-Qur'an, 49:13.
- 40 Dr. Mustafa Siba'I, *Some Glittering Aspects of The Islamic Civilization* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1984), p 6.
- 41 Imam Malik, *al-Muwatta*, Book of Good Character, Hadith No. 8 (Cambridge: Diwan Press, 1982), p 438.
- 42 Abu Dawood, *Sunan*, Book of Manners, chapter 7, Hadith No. 4782.(Riyadh: Darussalam, 1999), p 532.

The whole text of the Hadith is:

Narrated Abu Umamah: The Prophet (peace\_be\_upon\_him) said: I guarantee a house in the surroundings of Paradise for a man who avoids quarrelling even if he were in the right, a house in the middle of Paradise for a man who avoids lying even if he were joking, and a house in the upper part of Paradise for a man who made his character good.

- 43 Al-Qur'an, 47: 19.
- 44 Al-Qur'an, 25: 73.
- 45 Al-Qur'an, 30: 20-24

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- 46 Al-Qur'an, 2: 85.
- 47 Al-Qur'an, 2: 208.
- 48 Muhammad Iqbal, Dr. *Kulliyat e Iqbal*, (Lahore: Maktaba Jamal, 2009), p 375.
- 49 Dr. Mustafa Siba'I, *Some Glittering Aspects of The Islamic Civilization* (Kuwait: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1984), p 8.
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- 51 Al-Qur'an, 2: 256.
- 52 Akbar S. Ahmed, *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), p 117.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Malik, Ghulam Murtaza, Dr. *Jadid Nisab e Ta'leem* (Lahore: Pakistan Model Educational Institutions Foundation, 1993), p 3.
- 55 Al-Qur'an, 29: 45.
- 56 Muhammad Iqbal, Dr. *Kulliyat e Iqbal*, (Lahore: Maktaba Jamal, 2009), p 192.
- 57 Al-Qur'an, 5: 100. See also, 6: 116 "And if you obey most of those on the earth, they will mislead you far away from Allah's Path. They follow nothing but conjectures, and they do nothing but lie".
- 58 Muhammad Iqbal, Dr. *Kulliyat e Iqbal*, (Lahore: Maktaba Jamal, 2009), p 607.
- 59 Al-Qur'an, 3: 159 (And O Prophet, consult them in the matters of state). See also Al-Qur'an, 42: 38 (And they conduct their affairs by mutual consultation).
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- 64 See: Al-Qur'an, 75: 2.
- 65 See: Al-Qur'an, 12: 53.
- 66 See: Al-Qur'an, 89: 27.
- 67 See full text of Hadith in *Sahih Muslim*, Book of Travellers, chapter 69 (Madina: Dar al-Fikr, 19981), and *Musnad Ahmad*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1994), Pages: 385, 397, 401 and 460.
- 68 See full text of Hadith in *Sahih Bukhari*, Book of Marriage (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 1999), p 907.
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- 69 See full text of Hadith in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2514 (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 1999), p 571.
- 70 See full text of Hadith in *Sunan ibb Majah*, Chapter of Repentance, Hadith No. 4251 (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 1999), p 619.
- 71 Al-Qur'an, 9: 102.
- 72 See Al-Qur'an, 15: 29.
- 73 See Al-Qur'an, 13: 28.
- 74 See Al-Qur'an, 7:24-25.
- 75 See Al-Qur'an, 20: 123.
- 76 The Prophet (SAW) said: 'On the Day of Judgment every Prophet will come with his followers. A Prophet would come with only two persons who followed him, and a Prophet would come will only one person who followed him and it will also be seen that a Prophet would be coming by himself; no one followed him.' See *Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith No.6541 (Riyadh: Dar al-Salam, 1999).
- 77 See Al-Qur'an, 89: 27-30.