

Identity Movement and the Universal Civilization

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Civilizations exist at two levels –regional and universal. Regional civilizations rest on the basis of religions and personal identities; the universal civilization builds on human nature following the Aristotelian Principle. The so-called ‘clash of civilizations’ refers to the contradiction between regional civilizations. It is not appropriate to pose the contemporary problem of world violence in terms of the West vs. the rest, or the dar al-islam vs. the dar al-harb. Instead the basic question to ask is what the West plus the rest, or the dar al-islam plus the dar al-harb, can jointly contribute to the universal civilization and therefrom what benefits would accrue to each. This essay replaces the usual belligerent frame of reference with a positive construction invoking the public reason.

‘Between the individual and the totality of mankind are set up smaller groups as aids, though they often turn out obstacles, to the larger unity of mankind,’ writes Radhakrishnan.¹ The difficulties of distance and organization, the limitations of human heart, as well as the variety and richness of life, are responsible for the smaller groups, which are meant to be used as a means to a larger universality. Even if humanity becomes a more manageable unit of life, intermediate groups are bound to exist for the development of varying tendencies in the total human aggregate. The family, the clan, the tribe, and the nation, are successive stages in this constant approach to universality. On the way, however, there are plenty of pitfalls and derailments.

The thesis of clash-of-civilizations by Huntington sounds so impolite, fashionable talks do not like to admit it in public, but given the frequency of its denouncement the idea seems hard to shake off. What is happening in Afghanistan and Iraq is not new; imperialism is old. And history has seen centuries of *crusade* and *jihad*. One millennium ago Islamic law had sharply partitioned the world into two sides: the dar al-islam (the House of Islam) which was religiously proclaimed to be in perpetual conflict with the dar al-harb (the House of War).² Also, fruitful interaction among Arabia, Europe and India had been certainly impressive. The coin has two sides.

Civilizations come in two shapes: one relatively small in territorial size, the other big enough to cover the whole world, to be qualified as respectively ‘regional’ and ‘universal’. The former was explored by Toynbee among others while the latter has received little attention. Huntington was eloquent on one, but gave a short shrift to the other. All in all, we suppose, regional civilizations function within an overarching canopy of the universal civilization.

So long the focus of analytical attention has been on conflicts between kingdoms, empires or other regional adversaries. This essay suggests, first, shifting the frame of reference to a wider canvas, namely, cooperation among the regional and the universal civilizations, and then evaluating the benefits that would accrue to each. It contemplates a way of moderating the residual conflicts invoking a positive role for the public reason.

1. *Production of Identities* : Maulana Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi (1903-79) had set a historic example of identity formation — in this case, of Muslims.³ His life-long endeavour would enter the lexicon of radical Islam and resonate among Muslims around the world.

In the 1930s, against a backdrop of mounting agitation for India's independence, increasing numbers of Muslims came to believe that a Hindu-dominated India could subject them to hostility and discrimination. Their worries were compounded by the swelling indebtedness of Muslim farmers, mostly to Hindu moneylenders who were prepared to expropriate the lands of defaulters. The demand for a separate state for Muslims—Pakistan—arose. Maududi, the founder of Jama'at-i Islam (Party of Islam), first in India and then in Pakistan, objected to the idea of Pakistan on the ground that Muslims of the world belonged to an umma, entrusted with a comprehensive system of life to offer the world. Were they to practice Islam faithfully, the matter of national homeland would become absolutely immaterial. Maududi's sight was far wider, not over a mere portion of India; he envisaged the whole world, the umma, to be brought under one caliphate.

True Muslims merge their personalities and existence into Islam. They subordinate all their roles to the one role of being Muslims. As fathers, sons, husbands or wives, businessmen, landlords, labourers, and employees, they live as Muslims. They are completely immersed in Islam. Religion fully controlled their heads and hearts, their bellies and private parts.

But, lamented Maududi, the majority of so-called Muslims were barely practicing their faith. Their likes and dislikes, daily transactions, business activities and social relations had nothing to do with Islam, being based solely on personal considerations and self-interest. He called the latter group, the 'Partial Muslims.' Partial Muslims are no Muslims, to him. The creation of Pakistan would instill in its citizens an illusion of communal safety, thus accelerating the diminution of Islam's relevance in daily life.

Traditionally, Islam had insisted more on *behavioural* correctness (orthopraxy) than on doctrinal correctness (orthodoxy). For example, the regular recitation of sacred texts was generally considered more important than comprehending their meaning. Even in non-Arab lands, the call to prayer and the prayers themselves were almost always in Arabic, a language few understood.

Maududi demanded full religiosity in common functions of daily life like dress, shopping, jobs, and banking as part of *behavioural* correctness. He reminded Muslims that they needed to make a point of keeping their piety in public view. In all occasions they had to be conscious how their behaviour differed from that of others, making themselves easily distinguishable by their religious identity. It could serve the cause of enhancing Islam's visibility. If Muslim traders were to follow Islamic contracting procedures, and if Muslim consumers were to buy in ways distinctly Islamic, then as a result Islam would gain salience, enabling new generations to grow up in an environment where Islam appeared relevant to all practical decisions. If work enjoyed a religious meaning, and work and worship were perceived as a continuum, the modern Muslim would gain a unified personality, not a bifurcated one.

Medieval Europe, too, had listened to similar voices.⁴ The medieval thinkers took life as having a divine purpose, and that the idea of religion embraced all aspects of human life. The ultimate standard of human institutions and activity was religion. The perfect happiness of man cannot be other than the vision of the divine essence. Hence all activities fall within a single system, because all are ultimately related to a single end, and derive their significance from it.

The analogy by which society was described was that of the human body. Society, like the human body, was an organism composed of different members. Each member had his own function: prayer, or defense, or merchandise, or toiling the soil. Each must receive the means suited to his station, and must claim no more. Within classes there must be equality; if one takes into his hand the living of the two, his neighbour will go short. Between classes there must be inequality; for otherwise a class cannot perform its function, or enjoy its rights. Peasants must not encroach on those above them. Lords must not despoil peasants. Craftsmen and merchants must receive what will maintain their subsistence, and no more.

It was nothing less than the whole edifice of feudal society—class privilege, class oppression, exploitation, serfdom. But these things cannot, it was thought, be treated simply as alien to religion, for religion is all-comprehensive. They must be given some ethical meaning, must be shown to be the expression of some larger plan of nature. What could be more natural than to liken the society to human body?

As a rule of social policy, the doctrine was at once representative and protective. As a philosophy of society, it attempted to spiritualize the material by incorporating it in a divine universe. Its tendency was to dignify material activities by stamping them with the impress of a universal design.

Beginning in the 16th century, Europe had seen profound changes. Calvinism is said to have energized the spirit of capitalism. Calvin's doctrine of 'Calling' refuted the monastic asceticism of the day and sanctified individual's practical services to worldly affairs of the community 'as the highest form which the moral

activity of the individual could assume.' Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's—this Biblical injunction now came to rationalize the concept of separation of the profane from the sacred. Man got a fresh identity, discarding his medieval mantle of all-comprehensive religiosity: secularism and democracy took hold.

Most crucial identities of human beings are determined, in the ultimate analysis, by the prevailing mode of production.

2. *Deletion of Identity* : All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Indeed, the difference in genetic codes of any two human beings at birth is miniscule, mere one-tenth of one percent. Yet, in the course of their biological development the persons come to have so much of contrast in external and internal features like inherited fortune, living conditions, and physical abilities. Most of these disparities result from effects of social institutions. So occurs variation in personal identities, some of which may arguably deserve deletion.

There is a proposal of reservation, for 'other backward classes' (OBC), of 27 percent of seats of admission in educational institutions and of jobs in industry and government. Similar facilities are already available for the scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs). The basic criterion here is 'low' caste. But the category of caste is obsolete in contemporary India as explained below.

As the pastoral life of the vedic period was giving way to the agrarian mode of production a mechanism of allocating labour to agriculture had to be put in place. Peasants detested marginal lands in far-flung corners; they had to be somehow tied to tilling difficult soil. In addition, a grave financial crisis was at hand. Excessive imports of luxuries by the affluent aristocracy had drained away coins of precious metals to meet trade deficits leaving little money to service local business. Self-sufficient villages relying on barter arrangement was the answer. Conveniently, the varna-and-caste system emerged in that milieu.

In course of time the varna-caste order had lost its existential validity, yet persisted as a superstition. Indeed, it never had true theological support. Only misrepresentation of scriptures had created a false consciousness among the masses to make them accept it.⁵ Now democracy is incapable of confronting it; rather it affirms the prevailing social structure. Democracy may be an excellent manner of making relatively minor choices within an overall settled structure, but it cannot without circularity and absurdity be granted the capacity to choose between total social structures or value systems. Some preexisting structures contain within themselves a 'democratic' way of settling minor issues. Every society has its own type of democracy, e.g. the American democracy, the British democracy, and now the Iraqi democracy. Our culture gives us our identity; so who exactly to choose a culture when there is yet no self, no identity, no vision or set of values, which would carry out the choice? The policy of reservation,

navigated through the perfectly correct democratic channel, goes only to perpetuate the morally defunct varna-caste system.⁶

3. *Collision of Identities* : Ramlal is a father, a fisherman belonging to an 'untouchable' caste, an amateur flute player. He has other identities, too, but the path of several other possible identities was blocked by his caste identity. Because he is 'untouchable' the village school had not admitted him; the same fate has befallen his children.

Identities collide at the macro level, too. In remote antiquity in Greece, it was once supposed that the ideas in our mind and the thought associated with them were explicable, not in terms of the individual thinking, but by reference to some god (or some sort of being beyond the influence of direct human control) who caused the human to have the ideas and the thought processes in order to direct his activity. Later, between 600 and 300 BC, Greek philosophers came to the view that reason was a faculty of mind under individual control, where the mind is an instrument for evaluating and organizing human experience. Morality and ethics can only exist for individuals who have control, or choice, over their decision. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle maintained that the sustained exercise of reason would have the result that human beings could eventually hope to have a common standard of judgment, so that properly educated individuals, although each would do the thinking for himself, would have a common standard of truth in ethics and aesthetics as well as in the more obvious fields of mathematics and science.⁷ As a corollary to it, the classical Greek democracy was secular, separating the profane from the sacred.

Sayyid Qutb (1906-66) of Egypt had shared the glory with Maulana Maududi of being the chief ideologue of a radical interpretation of Islam. He noticed the infliction of a 'terrible alienation', a 'hideous schizophrenia' in the West. To Qutb, mankind's fatal error began with Socrates. The error consisted of an arrogant and deluded faith in the power of human reason — the arrogant faith, which after many years, produced in modern times the tyranny of technology over life. Any line drawn between sacred and secular would suggest that, in the business of daily life, there was more than one ultimate authority. But that would imply the existence of more than one God. Or, so thought Qutb.

The Western imagination, Qutb imagined, pictured God on one side, and science on the other. Religion over here; the physical world over there. On one side, the natural human yearning for God and for a divinely ordered life; on the other side, the natural human desire for knowledge for the physical universe. The Church against science; the scientists against the Church. Everything that Islam knew to be one, the Church divided into two. And, finally, the Western mind split asunder. Schizophrenia became total — the hideous schizophrenia of modern life. That was Qutb's finding.⁸

West's scientific and technical achievements allowed it to snatch the leadership of mankind from Islam, and to dominate the world; and, unrestrained by the weakened forces of Islam, West inflicted hideous schizophrenia on people and cultures in every corner of the globe. That was the source of miseries of modern life — the source of anxiety in contemporary society, the sense of drift, the purposelessness, the craving for false pleasures, the anomie, the alienation. Millions of followers of Maududi and Qutb subscribe to this story, more or less.

The collision between the Western worldview and the Maududi-Qutb perspective is palpable; it portrays an antagonistic contradiction. Mere recognition of multiple personal identities of individuals may fall far short of what is required to resolve it.

4. *The Universal Civilization* : It is natural for human beings, we postulate, to enjoy the exercise and demonstration of their capabilities, innate or trained. This enjoyment increases in two situations, namely, (a) the more the capability is realized, and (b) the greater its complexity. The first means that human beings take more pleasure in doing something as they become more proficient at it; while the second implies that of two activities they do equally well, they prefer the more intricate and subtle one. For the latter, here is an example. Algebra is more complex than elementary arithmetic. Someone who is good at both prefers to study algebra rather than arithmetic. Presumably complex activities are more enjoyable because they satisfy the desire for variety and novelty of experience, and leave room for feats of ingenuity and invention. They also evoke the pleasure of anticipation and surprise.

This natural propensity of human beings is known as the Aristotelian Principle.⁹ One of its effects is as follows. As we witness the exercise of well-trained activities by others, we want to be like those persons who can exercise the abilities that we find latent in our nature. To the extent that the esteem and admiration of others is desired, the activities favoured by the Aristotelian Principle are attractive for other persons as well. Thus there will be a common intent among all people for those activities.

Another natural characteristic of human beings is that no one person can do everything that he might do. The potentialities of each individual are far greater than those he can hope to realize. Hence everyone must select which of his potential abilities he wishes to accomplish. In view of the Aristotelian Principle, different persons with similar or complementary capacities may cooperate in realizing their common or matching nature. Thus is formed a social union, whereby each person can participate on the total sum of the realized natural assets of the others. Everyone gains to the maximum degree as he realizes his potentialities with the greatest possible assembly of complementary resources.

The universal civilization is now a social union of countless social unions of many different kinds. An individual can belong to multiple social unions according to his interests and capabilities. 'A philosophical attempt to work out a universal history of the world in accord with a plan of nature that aims at a

perfect civic union of the human species must be regarded as possible and even as helpful to this objective of nature's.'¹⁰ The dynamics of this universal history resides in the progress of reason determined by the Aristotelian Principle as explained below.

At a given moment the stock of capabilities of each individual, so in the society as a whole, is fixed and known; in course of time it will increase, and so will be the complexity of activities, signifying an improvement of the power of reason. That would constitute the progress of the universal civilization.

At a given moment, the equilibrium under the Aristotelian Principle can be depicted as a balance of two aspects. How much we learn i.e. by how much we enhance our existing capacities depends upon, on the one hand, how great those capacities are, and, on the other, how difficult is the effort of realizing them. There is a race here, so to speak, between (a) the increasing satisfaction of exercising greater realized skills, and (b) the increasing strains of learning as the skills become more strenuous and difficult — the former (a) is the marginal benefit, the latter (b) the marginal cost. The marginal benefit and the marginal cost both increase as we attempt to learn more complex activities — but the latter increases faster than the former. The equilibrium is reached at a point where marginal benefit and marginal cost are in balance. For, if we go further ahead, the marginal cost would exceed the marginal benefit.

Over time, as we accumulate capabilities, the appreciation of incremental pleasure of exercising more complex capacities improves. As a result, a new equilibrium at a higher level of skill complexity is reached."¹¹ Proficiency at greater complex activities may be taken as an index of the higher level of power of reason, which is a measure of civilization's achievement. This is how the universal civilization makes progress.

5. *Meeting the Challenge* : Learning from one another's efforts and appreciating their contributions, human beings gradually build up systems of knowledge and belief. They develop science, technology, arts, philosophy, and religion. The essential thing is that there be a shared final end and accepted ways of advancing it which allow for the public recognition of the attainment of everyone. Religious, philosophical, or moral convergence is neither possible nor necessary for universal unity; only toleration and positive appreciation of others is what it takes. Diversity is indeed a fountainhead of creativity and richness of life.

Difference in ideas and opinions is bound to appear. Sayyid Qutb, for instance, would like to shape the universal civilization as an Islamic umma under one caliphate ruled by the canons of Islamic law, the sharia.¹² Others may have alternatives in their mind. A first step in such a situation would be to have dialogue among the people in order to sort out the differences and try possible resolution. But topics like Islam or Hinduism or culture are too nebulous for

comprehension in public discourse. They are also too emotive. It is so easy to get lost in definitions and interpretations. Better it could be to start the process with more concrete and familiar topics like, say, witchcraft, or polygamy, or the use of interest rates in financial transactions, or the legitimacy of the practice of caste system, which are constitutive elements of a person's own set of beliefs. Bringing them under the reasoned scrutiny of public reason, step by step, it may be possible to remove superstitions, and to rework certain traditions which have gathered the moss of obscurantism. The conception of knowledge, sketched below, suggests that partial adjustments in selected items of belief may have ripple effects causing a reformation of one's entire field of beliefs.

'The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges. Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience.'¹³

How does the totality of our knowledge or beliefs change? 'A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field. Truth values have to be redistributed over some of our statements. Reevaluation of some statements entails reevaluation of others, because of their logical interconnections — the logical laws being in turn simply certain further statements of the system, certain further statements of the field.'

But the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions of experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to reevaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statement in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole.

One learns about religion, and accordingly forms a worldview at an early stage of life, mostly during childhood and adolescence, at family and school. And that outlook gets fixed in one's mind for ever. There is hardly any formal institution where one can have access to alternative viewpoints, and practically no freedom to make a selection of creeds and rituals from a variety of faiths and traditions. An institutionalized arrangement to bring the items of all faiths, one by one, to the light of public reason can release the individual from the prison of one bundle of dogmas acquired at childhood. From public exposition of all faiths he can be conscious of his commonality with others, and be informed of points of differences. That would promote tolerance and appreciation of others' faiths.

6. *Concluding Remarks* : An individual's identities are mostly consequences of the prevailing mode of production and of the burdens of history, leaving little room for him to maneuver. Identities unite as well as divide people; certainly they tend to create social hierarchy of unjustifiable proportion.

Coarseness of life often makes it inevitable for regional civilizations to collide. Rarely do we remember the presence of a universal civilization; some even deny the possibility of its existence, and even if it is there, they suspect its credentials. To be sure, the modes of production, through their action and interaction, generate a course in history which is neither smooth nor always monotonic in direction. So the universal civilization cannot consistently move forward over time. Yet, on the whole, evidently, it has a long-term tendency to acquire knowledge and improve the capabilities of mankind. It is up to the regional civilizations to draw from the undeniable strength of the universal civilization.

The human civilization, also known as the universal civilization, has discovered certain universal truths. One of those is as follows : 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' Universal truths ('universal principles' to Aristotle), or self-evident truths, are defined as statements which no properly disciplined mind could deny. This does not mean that everyone understands them and knows them to be true, or even that anyone whose attention has been drawn to them sees them immediately to be true and universal, but it means that those who give the matter sufficient attention and take time to learn the technique of inquiry will come to see their truth. Universal truths set the moral standard for the mankind. The conscience of the human civilization is often articulated through the United Nations.

Notes :

1. S Radhakrishnan, 1940, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, Oxford University Press, p 355.
2. The binary partition of the world, with religious sanction, might have been a factor of instability of Muslim empires. R Sau, 'The Rise and Fall of Muslim Empires,' *Frontier*, (38:43) 14 May 2006; S P Huntington, 1996, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking the World Order*, Simon & Schuster, pp 255-58. For a suggestion of reclassification of the world into three segments, namely, dar al-islam, dar al-harb, and dar al-shahada, see R Sau, 'Modernity, Islam and A Triple Liberation', *Islam and Muslim Societies*, 1(1) 2005, Lucknow University.
3. S A A Maududi, 1940, *Let Us Be Muslims*, Kuala Lumpur: Noor Deen; *The Economic Problems of Man and Its Islamic Solution*, (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1941); 'Formal and Real Islam Differentiated', in *Selected Speeches*, 1945. See also Timur Kuran, 'The Genesis of Islamic Economics: A Chapter in the Politics of Muslim Identity,' *Social Research*, (64:2) 1997.
4. R H Tawny, 1937, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Penguin, pp 35-37.
5. R Sau, 'Manu's Curse,' *Frontier*, (38:24) 1 January 2006; 'Two Theorems on the Hindu Varna-Caste Order,' *Frontier*, (38:42) 7 May 2006.
6. E Gellner, 1994, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* Vengum, p 185; R Sau, 'Reservation on Reservation,' *Frontier*, (38:46) 4 June 2006.
7. R Ackermann, 1965, *Theories of Knowledge*, McGraw-Hill, p 5.
8. P Berman, 2003, *Terror and Liberalism*, W W Norton, pp 60-102.
9. J Rawls, 1999, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, pp 374.

10. I Kant, 1784, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent,' in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, p 38.
11. An equilibrium, with the Aristotle Principle, and its dynamics can be illustrated with geometry. Draw a graph with the horizontal axis representing 'complexity of activity' and the vertical axis representing alternatively 'marginal benefit' or 'marginal cost.' Let AA be the upward-sloping marginal benefit line, and CC the upward-sloping marginal cost line. Line CC is steeper than line AA; it intersects line AA from below at point E — this E is the point of equilibrium at a given period. In the next period, the stock of capability is larger due to the addition to capability in the earlier period. Now the earlier marginal benefit line AA would shift up to line BB, for the enjoyment or satisfaction derived from exercise of capability varies with the stock of capabilities (as well as with the complexity of the activity). The intersection of BB and CC at point F would be the new equilibrium point. The diagram shows that point F has higher degree of complexity than point E. See, R Sau, 2003, *Stability and Development in South Asia*, K P Bagchi, p 58.
12. Some believers consider the Islamic law, sharia, as divine, and hence one of the three sources of Islam, the other two being the Koran, and the sunna (the Prophet's tradition). More than a century after the death of the Prophet, the project of writing Islamic law was set up. It took more than one century for four eminent schools of Islamic jurisprudence to compose the sharia. They drew upon four sources, namely, the Koran, the sunna, and two major principles of jurisprudence, viz. ijma (consensus) and qiyas (reasoning by analogy). Some scholars have raised question about the position of sharia in Islam on the ground of probable limitations of the apparatus of authentication that were used, and the application of several additional principles of jurisprudence, especially like nask (the abrogation or repeal of the legal efficacy of certain verses of the Koran in favour of certain other verses) which might have distorted the reception of Koranic messages into the formulation of sharia. They say, after all, the sharia was man-made; hence it does not have divine revelatory inspiration. 'Islamic law [sharia] is man-made and thus subject to human interpretation and revision,' observes Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia and director of the Nadhlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim organization ('Extremism Isn't Islamic Law', Washington Post, 23 May 2006). See also A A An-Naim, 1996, *Toward an Islamic Reformation*, Syracuse University Press, 11-33.
13. W A O Quine, 1980, *From a Logical Point of View*, Harvard University Press, p 42.