



IPS INSIGHTS

Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

Contemporary Civilizational Changes and Muslim Thought

Prof. Dr. Anis Ahmad ¹

Western Civilizational Dominance and the Intellectual Subjugation of Muslim Societies

The dominance of Western civilization has now assumed a form in which it is increasingly viewed and described as a global civilization. Cultures existing in different regions have reorganized themselves, along with their social, economic, and intellectual structures, on this basis. At the same time, an intellectual movement against the colonial system and its associated mode of thought is also taking root in different parts of the world. In relation to Islam, the center of this discourse lies in Western universities, and its reverberations can also be heard in Muslim-majority societies.

Against this backdrop, it is a ground reality that people who lived under the rule of European imperial powers, as well as people in some countries that have achieved political independence, remain intellectually overawed by foreign cultures and scientific advancement because of Europe's political domination, economic exploitation, and educational imperialism. Consequently, many ways of living have become incorporated into their own cultures and civilizations and have become part of their everyday lives because of this cultural and educational subjugation.

The Two stages of the Intellectual Response

The solution needs to be pursued at stages levels. First, at the intellectual stage, the true

contours of Islamic culture should be clearly articulated and its positive dimensions, in the light of its sources, should be brought to the scholarly and communicative spheres without apology and with pride and confidence. This cannot be achieved through “personality worship,” as some contemporary and South Asian historians have attempted by selecting certain rulers or military commanders as their focus.

Stage One: Positively Explaining Islamic Culture

The first stage is to clarify the true contours of Islamic culture and positively explain its essential dimensions in the light of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and history.

Islamic Culture: Concept, Foundations, and Practical Manifestations

This concerns a comprehensive understanding of culture—that is, the complete reflection of a belief system should be manifested in the family, society, and social values. Only in this form can it be regarded as Islamic culture. Islamic culture is not the name of *qawwali* or *urs*. Rather, it consists of a way of thinking based on *Tawhid* (the Oneness of God), together with truth and honesty, justice, selflessness, humility, *ta'awun 'ala al-birr* (cooperation in righteousness), *amr bil-ma'ruf* (enjoining what is right), and *nahi 'an al-munkar* (forbidding what is wrong) in the home and marketplace. Similarly, in the

¹ Member of the National Advisory Council, Institute of Policy Studies

sciences, it entails an approach directly grounded in the principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah—not a revival of debates concerning the *Mu'tazilah*, *Jabriyyah*, or *Qadariyyah*.

This can only be accomplished through the ethical reconstruction and reformulation of the sciences. Culture is a worldview and a theory of action, and the Qur'an and Sunnah have already clarified it through the standards distinguishing Islam from *Jahiliyyah*. By this criterion, it would not be correct to regard the conduct of people living under the rule of the Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Ottoman, Mughal, and other dynasties as an exemplary Islamic culture.

Only that culture and literature which are founded upon the principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah can be described as Islamic. Thus, the first task is to positively explain Islamic culture in the light of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and history. This is the first stage.

Stage Two: Analysing the Foundations of Jahiliyyah Civilization and Culture

The second stage, which should proceed simultaneously, is a direct analysis of the foundations of *Jahiliyyah* civilization and culture. This task should involve diagnosing these foundations on the basis of the writings of Western or European intellectuals and then subjecting that diagnosis to critical analysis. Even in terms of critique, so much material has now emerged from European and American thinkers themselves that simply presenting their views in their own words would make the true contours of Eurocentric civilization and thought clear. If further criticism is added in the light of Islamic values and the Islamic worldview, a comprehensive response would naturally emerge.

Contemporary Intellectual and Civilizational Challenges: Priorities and Required Measures

In my view, given the priorities among contemporary issues, there is a need to work on the following subjects:

- **Challenging Skepticism, the Denial of**

Knowledge, and Atheism: It is imperative that we undertake an analysis and rational examination, based on reasoned arguments, of skepticism, the denial of knowledge, and atheism.

- **Understanding and Exposing the Roots of Islamophobia:** There is a need to reach the roots of *Islamophobia* and bring its real nature to light. In this regard, there is a need to highlight the 2025 Oxford University publication *Re-inventing Islam*, along with other writings of a similar nature, so that young people can be exposed to the research-based views of Western thinkers themselves and can free themselves from the spell of Western thought.
- **Addressing Ethical Relativism and Moral Individualism:** Under the influence of European civilization, a fundamental problem today is that every individual has his or her own doctrine and wishes to assume the role of a *mufti* by independently expressing opinions on ethical issues. This is a manifestation of individualism. The same mode of thinking is increasingly being promoted among women under the slogan, "My body, my choice."

Islamic ethics, by virtue of being universal and divinely revealed, are not affected by the passage of time. Islamic moral values are permanent and not relative. However, this understanding does not arise naturally in a mind influenced by the European civilizational ideal; it needs to be consciously instilled. Our fundamental problem is not freedom from moral values but deviation from them. This needs to be clarified at the individual, family, societal, and national levels, and its promotion through education is essential.

- **Revitalizing and Strengthening the Family System:** One of the fundamental distinctions between Islamic and European civilizations is Islam's family system, which, under the influence of European civilization, has not merely been affected but has also suffered disintegration and fragmentation. It

requires immediate attention. Without strengthening the family system, we cannot eliminate Western influences. It is necessary to convince not only the younger generation but also parents through reasoned arguments. The role of mass media is extremely important in this regard and must be utilized.

- **Decolonizing Knowledge, Education, and the Social Sciences:** On the intellectual front, there is a need to **decolonize** the minds and thinking of university graduates. Our conception of the economy, society, politics, and even “development” has become deeply afflicted by a colonial mentality. Our ways of thinking and rational criteria are borrowed, while our own values are not being made the standard of evaluation.

Therefore, in order to move beyond the neo-colonial mindset and culture, it is essential to **decolonize the social sciences and other disciplines**. The positive solution lies in

an epistemology based on Islamic ethical values and an Islamic conception of the universe and life. This needs to be presented repeatedly on different intellectual fronts. Without this, no meaningful change or reform is possible.

- **Upholding the Sanctity of the Constitution:** There is a need to discuss violations of the sanctity of the Constitution of the state so that its sanctity can be maintained and institutions cannot be given the opportunity to act arbitrarily.
- **Establishing Regular Intellectual Engagement and Public Guidance:** In order to counter the influence of external ideas, an intellectual session should be organized every two months on contemporary social and ethical issues. Individuals from different segments of society should be invited to participate, and their intellectual guidance should be undertaken as part of a broader campaign.

