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Civilizational Problem or Political Crisis? Comparative Analysis of Mālek Bennabī and Syed Mawdūdī's Approach to Renaissance

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Abstract

After having reached the stage where Islamic civilization delivered optimum, it started declining gradually. Nevertheless, in different epochs of Islamic history, some remarkable personalities emerged reclaiming the functionality of *ihyā*; i.e., the renaissance principle. In the contemporary times, Mālek Bennabī and Syed Mawdūdī have phenomenally contributed to the Muslim renaissance discourse. Both of them have critically examined the pathology of *jumūd*; i.e., the tendency of stagnation in the Muslim world. Although, they identified similar causes and symptoms, nevertheless, having lived in different socio-political contexts, they came up with certain methodological differences in their approach. Both the scholars developed a systematic response suggesting a way forward—the method of renaissance. In Bennabī's discourse, the pathology is fundamentally civilizational, i.e., crisis in the civilizational equation between man, soil and time. While in Mawdūdī's discourse, the pathology is fundamentally political; i.e., crisis in the nature of political relation between state, society and religion. Against this backdrop, the paper contends to; first, the paper presents a brief analysis of Bennabī's civilizational approach and Mawdūdī's political approach in order to understand their scheme of thought while engaging with the question of *jumūd* and *ihyā*. Second, the paper juxtaposes the three key concepts namely civilization, religion, and revival used by both Bennabī and Mawdūdī in their theoretical elaborations to outline the differences and similarities in their method of analysis.

Keywords: Islam, Decline, Renaissance, Civilizational Approach, Political Approach

Introduction

Civilizations rise and fall. In the context of Islam, rise and fall of nations and civilizations is a historical principle controlled by the “indiscriminate law of God.”¹ There is a correlation between the life of civilization (*hayāt al-hadārah*) and the life of man (*hayāt al-insān*). The existing state of man reflects the existing state of his(er) civilization and vice versa. In a sense, man is the miniature prototype of any civilization. In similitude to man, civilization takes birth (*mīlād*), celebrates youth (*awj*), and reaches oldhood (*ufūl*). The Islamic civilization, like other civilizations, after centuries of social evolution, expansion and development, started revealing signs of decline by the end of the 18th century. The function of ‘transformative ethics’, ‘knowledge production’ and ‘critical thought process’—the three revolutionary essentials of Islamic civilization—observed swift diminution. Consequently, the *delivering* capacity: intrinsic feature of a civilization to facilitate the *required* conditions encouraging man’s performativity, reduced to the level of inertia. Islamic civilization lost its proficiency of employing the productive synchronization of spiritual, ethical and material values into the functioning of its institutional mechanism.

The *decline* of Islamic civilization overthrew the dynamic physiognomies of the “magnificent past”. The results were obvious; the Muslims lost the inspiring *ideology*, centralizing *identity*, shared *legacy*, and motivation of common *defence*. They allowed themselves, as individuals and societies,

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¹S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Nations Rise and Fall, Why?* 2009, Retrieved July 8, 2020. PDF of the book available at <http://www.al-islamforall.org/Prpmohd/PRPMOHD.ASP.4>.

to be *colonized*. Living under the structured patterns of “colonial socialization” for decades, the Muslims, from the Middle East to North Africa and from the South Asia to Central Asia, were compelled to *choose* one among the two options. That is, either to *normalize* the colonization dynamics or to *dehabitualize* the colonized behaviour through critical analysis and liberation movement. Arguably, the second position was “call for *renaissance*” (*al-nahdah*). In the recent past, Bennabī and Mawdūdī chose the second option; i.e., *renaissance over normalization*. In this paper my purpose is to do two things: first, present a brief analysis of Mālek Bennabī’s *civilizational* approach and Syed Mawdūdī’s *political* approach in order to examine their methodological engagement; second, juxtapose three key concepts; *civilization*, *religion*, and *revival* conceptualized and applied by both Bennabī and Mawdūdī in their theoretical analysis to outline the essential differences and similarities in their method and approach.

2. Mālek Bennabī’s *Civilizational Approach*

Mālek Bennabī (1905-1973) was a renowned Algerian thinker. He is believed to be the second systematic civilizational theorist after Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406).² Bennabī wrote on diverse issues such as philosophy of history, social thought, social and historical change, and culture, nevertheless, theorization of civilizational question occupies *centrality* in his entire scheme of thought. His critical enquiry into the universal laws, existing conditions of culture and rapidly changing social structures in a systematic *civilizational framework* make him methodologically unique. Bennabī witnessed the consequences of decline of the Muslim Algeria. This led him to identify and approach the causes of the Muslim decadence and, simultaneously, to conceptualize the cycle of rebirth of the Muslim civilization- the *renaissance* dynamic.³ In Bennabī’s frame of reference, lack of *taraqqī* (scientific advancement), *tagqadum* (material development) or *dawlah* (political state) is not the whole Muslim problem, but rather, part of the *problem*. The Muslim *problem*, in Bennabī analysis, is entrenched in the *uncritical* understanding of the ‘social change’ and its impact on human performance. In Bennabian context, the appropriate approach to problematize the topic is *civilizational* because, as he claims, “the problem of any people is but that of its civilization.”⁴ Inferring, to have the critical assessment of their problems, the Muslims seriously need to understand their civilization: its values and its morals, its intellectual and social foundations, and then examine their own *psycho-behavioural* equation vis-à-vis those referential values and foundations.⁵

To establish man’s relation with civilization, Bennabī formulated his famous civilizational formula: “Civilization= Man+Soil+Time”. In Bennabī’s equation, man, soil and time are the “rudimentary capital” of a civilization.⁶ Bennabī identifies man as “the fundamental condition of all civilizations.”⁷ Implying, only man (*insān* referring both genders) has been *blessed* with the ability to trigger the ‘action of change’ while as other factors such as soil (*turāb*) and time (*waqt*) facilitate the medium wherein which the change takes place. According to Bennabī, the Muslims face the abysmal backwardness because they “no longer know how to apply their genius to the given

²Badran Benlahcene, “The Khaldunian Influence on Modern Studies in Civilization: Bennabi’s Approach to Civilization as an Example,” in *El-Hiwar El-Fikrie (Dialogue Intellectual)*, 9 (2007): 45-58.

³Zaid Ahmad, and Badrane Benlahcene, “A 20th Century Civilization Discourse: Some Notes on Malek Bennabi,” in *Umaran Journal of Muslim Affairs* 1, no.1 (2015):1-16.

⁴Badrane Benlahcene, “The Khaldunian Influence on Modern Studies,” 45-58.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Adnan Khalil Basha, “Malek Bennabi and His Modern Islamic Thought,” (Ph.D. Thesis: University of Salford, 1992), 64.

⁷Badrane Benlahcene, *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations of Malek Bennabi’s Approach to Civilization* (London: IIIT, 2011), 43.

conditions of soil and time.”⁸ Bennabī’s renaissance theory is suggestive of “inside to outside” change, resulting in the transformation of an individual (*farad*) first, followed by the collective. Bennabī has criticized those Muslim reformists who emphasized to change the milieu- *the victim of the change-* rather than the man- *the creator of the change.*⁹ In Benlahcene’s analysis of Bennabī’s ‘realm of figures’, man naturally comes out to be, as I call him, the “carrier element” of a civilization. Thus, if man’s *action* is positive, there will be harmony in the movement of civilization and concordance in its objectives. But, in the otherwise situation, there will be pandemonium and destruction.¹⁰

Bennabī condemns the cultural aggression of the West, but he believed that the *problem* was more of the internal conditions; i.e., weak ‘social relations network’ of colonized subjects. He coined the term “*al-qābilīyyah li al-istām’ar*” translated as ‘colonizability’: the tendency to get colonized, to describe that internal *problem*. Thus, to Bennabī, “colonizability” of the Muslim mind is a major factor that allowed the *colonizers* to control the *colonized* Muslim subjects.¹¹ To examine the dynamics of ‘colonizability’, it is imperative to understand Bennabī’s three stages of civilization namely the spiritual stage, the rational stage and the instinctive stage. In the spiritual stage, man’s natural instincts (*fīrah*) are controlled and streamlined under the guiding principles of religion through “organic synthesis.”¹² In the course of synthesis, according to Bennabī, *homomatura* (man of natural instincts) is transformed into the “conditioned man.”¹³ This stage, according to Bennabī, is the stage of dynamic transformation that marks the beginning of the “historical action”. Applying this principle to Islamic civilization, Bennabī regarded the period between the first *wahy* (revelation) at Hirā to the battle of Siffin as the spiritual period of Islamic civilization. And, this stage, according to Bennabī, is the soul of the Islamic civilization.¹⁴

After completing the spiritual stage, society moves into another stage called as rational stage. During this period, civilization flourishes in art and science. Rationality predominantly controls the human behaviour. This period, according to Bennabī, is the epitome of glory in the life of a civilization. Nevertheless, spiritual forces start losing their control and natural instincts start gaining freedom in this stage. Moreover, social functions are set free and man starts losing balance over his vital energy while performing social action. Applying this principle to Islamic civilization, Bennabī considered Umayyad period as the rational period of Islamic civilization.¹⁵ Finally, the civilization enters into its last stage, the instinctive stage. Since in this stage, social action is controlled by *individualistic* natural instincts, therefore, this period is marked by corruption and moral weakness. Society loses its streamlined character and natural instincts, applying Bennabi’s expression, “no longer functions as a harmonious whole.”¹⁶ Consequently, in the absence of moral function, members

⁸Malik Bennabi, *Islam in History and Society*, trans., Asma Rachid (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Studies in Contemporary Thought, 1993), 14.

⁹Benlahcene, *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations*, 32.

¹⁰Badrane Benlahcene, “Malek Bennabi’s Concept and Interdisciplinary Approach to Civilisation,” in *Int. J. Arab Culture, Management and Sustainable Development* 2, no. 1 (2011): 55-71.

¹¹Phillip Chiviges Naylor, “The Formative Influence of French Colonialism on the Life and Thought of Malek Bennabi (Malik bin Nabi),” in *French Colonial History*, Vol. 7 (2006): 129-142.

¹²Mālek Bennabī, *On the Origins of Human History*. Mohamed T. al-Mesawi (Trans.), (Kuala Lumpur: The Open Press, 1998), 64.

¹³Benlahcene, *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations*, 223.

¹⁴Fawzia Barium, “Malik Bennabi and Intellectual Problems of the Muslim Ummah,” in *American Journal of Islam and Society* 9, no.3 (1992): 325-337.

¹⁵Benlahcene, *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations*, 72-75; Fawzia Barium, “Malik Bennabi and Intellectual Problems,” 325-337.

¹⁶Mālek Bennabī, *On the Origins of Human History*, 91.

of society become absolutely free and society plunges into a worst state of lawlessness and chaos. The creativity and scientific temperament stops. Society becomes arrogant, ignorant and sterile. According to Bennabī, instinctive phase marks the loss of efficacy in the individual and collective behaviour and civilizational cycle ends. Applying this principle, Bennabī proposed that fourteenth century was the turning point of the decadence of Muslim civilization.¹⁷ According to Bennabī, the man of this stage is “man outside civilization” (*al-rajul khārij al-haḍāra*).¹⁸

The brief discussion on Bennabī’s thought underscores that it is the “man of ideas” who makes the civilization and not the reverse. Bennabī asserts, accumulation of things (*takdīs*) or race for scientific advancement and material development is not the real solution (*al-hal al-haqīqīyah*), but rather it is superficial understanding of the *problem* which might provide a short-term solution. Nevertheless, it will create more problems instead of solving the *problem* in the long-term reference. Therefore, the process of *renaissance* has to start by critically analysing the problems of man, particularly his moral, social, intellectual and psychological problem, within the framework of civilizational conditions he lives.

3. Syed Mawdūdī’s Political Approach

Syed Abul ‘Alā Mawdūdī (1903-1979) was an “influential Islamist voice”¹⁹ “systematic thinker”²⁰ and “leading interpreter”²¹ of the Islam of modern era. Mawdūdī wrote almost on all subjects concerning the various aspects of Islamic way of life. Being trained in the traditional Islamic sciences, Mawdūdī distinguished himself among his contemporaries by championing the “systemic approach” to Islam. He called for the revival of Islam, not as a ritualistic faith, but rather as the dynamic system of thought and action (*nizām al-fikr wa al-amal*).²² The systemic framework, according to Mawdūdī, is not his own innovation, but rather it is mentioned by God Himself that He perfected the religion (*takmīl al-dīn*) and conferred it as the perfection of His blessing (*itmām al-ni'mah*) on Prophet Mohammad.²³ In Mawdūdian interpretation, here “perfected the religion” means making Islam “the complete system (*nizām*) answering all the questions of human life.”²⁴ In his analysis of the causes of the Muslim decadence, Mawdūdī asserts that the Muslim decadence began when the majority of the Muslims started treating Islam as a “ritualistic religion”. That is, Islam, instead of being a dynamic social function, was reduced to few *individualistic* forms of worship (*‘ibādah*). He argues, such “ritualistic understanding” (*al-fahm al-shā'irī*) of Islam allowed infiltration of superstitious and irrational beliefs and disintegrated the Muslim intellectual milieu. As a result, Islam lost the determining position that it held previously in socio-political matters. Moreover, according to Mawdūdī, it led to a far-reaching catastrophe, separating religion (*dīn*) from state (*dawlah*). The political institutions became *corrupt* and spirituality turned into a deadwood.

¹⁷Fawzia Bariun, “Malik Bennabi and Intellectual Problems,” 325-337.

¹⁸Benlahcene, *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations*, 81.

¹⁹Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdūdī and the Making of Islamic Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3.

²⁰Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (New York: The New American Library, 1957), 236.

²¹C. E. Bosworth et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Edited) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 873.

²²See, Roy Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdūdī and Political Islam: Authority and the Islamic State* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

²³Al-Qur’ān: al-Maida 5:3.

²⁴S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding Qur’ān* (Tafhim al-Qur’ān). Vol. 1, Trans. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2010), 444.

This “internal crisis”, in Mawdūdī’s appraisal, unlocked a “welcome door” for the West to rule the Muslim East. Subsequently, Islam merely remained a factor in defining one’s nominal identity.²⁵

In the Mawdūdīan discourse, the *problem* of the Muslim decadence cannot be solved unless the Muslims reclaim the lost political legitimacy of Islam. To conceptualize this idea, Mawdūdī extensively wrote on political issues such as the concept of state, principles of legislation and execution, rights and duties, meaning of citizenship and civil society from the Islamic perspective. He criticized the contemporary political theories such as secularism, democracy, nationalism, capitalism, communism, and monarchism while using revelation (*wahy*) aided by reason (*‘aqil*) to formulate his argument. For Mawdūdī, all these *isms*, having developed in a certain Western context, have no idea of spirituality and invalidate the role of divine guidance (*hidāyah*). Thus, instead of unravelling human sufferings, these formulations exceptionally added to the deepening of the *problem*.

Mawdūdī’s political theory is based on the fundamental *doctrine* that religion is inseparable from politics. According to this definition, it is impossible for the Muslims to perform any sort of revival (*iḥyā*) or reform (*īslāḥ*) outside the *circle* of faith. And, faith could not become a determining force without a faith-based political structure. Therefore, for Mawdūdī, to be a Muslim is to create and live under an Islamic state, for ultimate *sovereignty* rests in the divine order.²⁶ He further asserts that true Islam would become an ideal, incapable to function as a *system* and as a civilization, if it does not have its own laws and an authority enforcing those laws. He criticized the “non-political” and “*maw’ūd*” (reward) approach of prominent *ulama* such as Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thanvī, Mawlānā Manzūr N’umānī, Mawlānā Ḥussāin Madnī, and Mawlānā Abul Hassan ‘Alī Nadwī of his time on the grounds that their *apologetic* attitude brought more disgrace to Islam instead of making it practically a relevant “system of life.”²⁷ Having traced the history and method (*manhaj*) of the Prophets, as he claims, Mawdūdī asserts that establishment of an Islamic state is not *maw’ūd*; i.e., something given as a reward, but rather it is *maqṣūd*; i.e., the objective. Affirming his idea of Islamic state, he writes: “So, the end objective of the *mission* of the prophets has been to establish *hukūmat-i ilāhiyah* (God’s Sovereignty), and give effect to that entire system (*nizām*) of life that they had brought from God.”²⁸

Mawdūdī centralized his political theory around the concept of *hukūmat-i ilāhiyah* (God’s Sovereignty), which he later renamed, on the consultation of Mawlānā Amīn Ahsan Islāhī, as *iqāmah al-dīn* (the establishment of the religion). According to Mawdūdī, *iqāmah al-dīn* would not be practically possible unless individual (*farad*) submit his personal and public life to the commandments of Islamic *shari’ah*.²⁹ Elaborating on the theory of *iqāmah al-dīn*, he maintained that *iqāmah al-dīn* revolves around the three fundamental principles; *tawḥid* (Oneness of God), *risālah* (Prophethood) and *khilāfah* (vicegerency). In the words of Vali Nasr, “it was *khilāfat* that governed the intellectual

²⁵See, S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Islāmī Riyāsat: Falsafah, Nizam-i Kār or Usūl-i Qawānīn*, eds., Khurshid Ahmad (Pakistan: Islamic Publications Private Ltd, 1967); S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*, Trans., Al-Ash’ari [Tajdīd Wa Iḥya-o-Dīn] (New Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī Publishers, 2009); S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *The Islamic Way of Life*, Trans., Khurshid Ahmad, and Khurram Murad (New Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī Publisher, 2009).

²⁶S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Islāmī Riyāsat: Falsafah, Nizam-i Kār or Usūl-i Qawānīn*, eds., Khurshid Ahmad (Pakistan: Islamic Publications Private Ltd, 1967), 5-15.

²⁷Arshad Zaman, “Syed Abul ‘Alā Mawdūdī on Islamic Economics: A Review Article,” *Islamic Studies* 50, No. 3/4 (2011): 312-314.

²⁸S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Sīrat-i Sarvar-i ‘Ālam*, Ed. Na’im Siddiqui and Abdul Walik Alvi (Lahore: Idara Tarjumanul Qur’an, 1978), 336.

²⁹Wajid Mehmood, and Waqar Ahmad, “Mawlana Mawdūdī, Islam and Ideology,” in *Al-Azhār* 4, no. 1 (2018): 20-36.

and practical formulations on which Mawdūdī based the working of the state (Islamic state).³⁰ Mawdūdī calls this system of government as “theo-democracy” that is, a *form* government which is elected by the people but it operates under the guiding principles of *shar’iāh*. Mawdūdī, much before Egyptian Syed Qutub, introduced the term *jadīd jahilliyah* (modern ignorance) to describe the state of socio-political affairs in the Muslim world on the grounds that these so-called Muslim states lack Islamic political principles.³¹

Mawdūdī wrote extensively providing religious basis to his political ideas. For example, he argued that the acts of worship (*ibādāt*) are important because they serve as *means* of preparation (*tarbīyah*) to achieve the “higher objective”, which is to establish the Law of God.³² Similarly, he views the Holy Qur’an as the “revolutionary message” to be read, understood and implemented. He retained the *systemic* language in his *magnum opus* exegesis of the Holy Qur’ān namely *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Towards Understanding the Holy Qur’ān). In his controversial work, *Qur’ān Kī Chār Bunyādī Iṣtilāḥīn* (The Four Basic Qur’ānic Terms), Mawdūdī challenged the orthodox meaning of the four basic Qur’ānic terms; *ilah* (divinity), *rabb* (lord), *ibādah* (worship) and *dīn* (religion). He presented them in a renewed *explanation* fitting to his *systemic* framework. For example, the term *dīn* in Mawdūdīan context is an “all embracing ethos” that includes politics on the top. Similarly, *ibādah* does not just connote to praise of God (in words or numbers) and seek salvation, but rather it is “revering, serving and obeying God in our whole lives.”³³ In his other significant works such as *Al-Jihād Fil Islām* (Jihād in Islam), *Mas’alayie Qawmiyat* (The Question of Nationalism), *Islām Kā Niżām-i Siyāsat* (The Political System of Islam), *Khilāfat-o-Mulūkiyat* (The Caliphate and Kingship), and *Tajdīd Wa Ihyā-yi Dīn* (History of Revivalist Movement in Islam), Mawdūdī reiterated his standpoint that one-time panacea for the Muslims is to replace the “absolute sovereignty of people” with the “absolute sovereignty of God.”

The brief discussion underlines the fact that in Mawdūdī’s *systemic* framework, Islam essentially demands a “socio-political revolution”, creating conducive circumstances for individual’s spiritual and moral development. The foundation of the “socio-political revolution” for Mawdūdī is the Qur’ānic injunction that “you should establish religion and make no divisions in it.”³⁴ It is within this reference, Mawdūdī wrote about “social transformation,” and “revival of Islamic political system.”

4. Key Concepts used by Bennabī and Mawdūdī: Comparative Analysis

Bennabī and Mawdūdī both were raised in critical socio-political circumstances. Their fellow countrymen had started *normalizing* the cultural, scientific, and political superiority of the West. It is under such harsh conditions, Bennabī and Mawdūdī developed their thought. They both wrote books, articles and gave lectures over wide-range of subjects, criticising the Muslim *status quo*, political corruption- internal problems- and cultural aggression of the “colonial powers”- external problem. Since, both were concerned about the *renaissance* of the Muslim world, therefore, primary focus was on those concepts and terms which were relevant to their scheme of thought. In this section, I compare three key concepts; *civilization*, *religion*, and *revival* applied by both Bennabī and Mawdūdī to engage with the problem of decadence and renaissance of the Islamic civilization.

³⁰Nasr, *Mawdūdī and the Making*, 80.

³¹S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *The Four Basic Qur’ānic Terms* (Qur’ān Kī Chār Bunyādī Iṣtilāḥīn), Trans., Abu S’ad (Lahore: Islamic Publications Pvt. Ltd. 2009).

³²S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Islāmī Riyāsat*, 51.

³³S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *The Four Basic Qur’ānic Terms*, 138.

³⁴Ash-Shura 42:13.

4.1. Concept of Civilization

Bennabī adopted etiological approach in his civilizational research. This approach allowed him to critically examine the performance of human societies and changing dynamics of civilisations.³⁵ Bennabī primarily developed his thought around the *civilizational question* and other socio-political issues were discussed within that reference.³⁶ He defined civilization as “[the] sum total of the moral as well as material conditions which allow a given society to provide each one of its members with all the social guarantees necessary for his development.”³⁷ According to Bennabī, for a nation to understand its problem and resolve it, it is quite important to comprehend the construction of its civilizational elements. In this context, Bennabī’s understanding of the Islamic civilization is basically the diagnosis of the diseases in the Muslim world. In contrast, Mawdūdī’s approach to civilization is more *theo-political*. He asserts that a civilization comprises five elements: (i) the concept about worldly life, (ii) the aim of life, (iii) the fundamental thoughts and beliefs, (iv) the training of individuals, and (v) the collective system.³⁸ In Mawdūdīan context, civilization itself has no power to control the rise or fall of a nation; rather, it is the nature of relationship with the belief (*‘aqidah*) and the *system* (of thought and action) emanating from it that controls the ‘rise and downfall’ of a nation. According to Mawdūdī, in compliance with Bennabī, conglomeration of arts and architecture, material manifestations of social life, style of culture and political conduct does not construct the essential core of a civilization. These structures evolve through historical process and represent different contours of development. They are not the actual creative *values*, i.e., the soul of civilization. For Mawdūdī, the soul of civilization is its system of belief. He was critical of the orientalist position that the Arabs selectively collected materials from other civilizations and combined them to construct their own civilization. He argued that, the layout, the style of construction, and the purpose and its suitability to its purpose is essentially its (Islamic civilization’s) own. However, the criticism Mawdūdī presented is more of theological nature. In Mawdūdīan context, Islamic civilization actually represents a broader version of the Muslim society, which employs articles of faith as its foundational basis.³⁹

In Bennabī’s theorization, civilization follows the cyclic course. It starts its journey from taking birth (*mīlād*) - the “spiritual stage”-, reaches to youth (*awāj*) - the “rational stage”- and then finally there comes the oldhood (*uṣūl*) - the “instinctive stage.” In each stage, civilization produces men of different characteristics and capacities. Bennabī’s famous civilizational equation (civilization=man+soil+time) suggests that the two sides of the equation are directly proportional to each other. That is, if a civilization fails to *deliver* to provide necessary conditions, man would not be able to make effective use of soil and time (in their social meaning). Similarly, if man fails to revive his ideas, he would not be able to revive his action (while utilizing the conditions of soil and time) which, in turn, would halt the progress of civilization.⁴⁰ Mawdūdī also believed in the cyclic movement of civilization, however, he provides a different paradigm. For Mawdūdī, God has put permanent laws or *sunnatū Allah* out there in the cosmos. Everything, from the sub-atomic to huge celestial bodies, is subject to His *divine Law*. Mawdūdī extends the interference of “God’s Law” into the sphere of human action and theorizes that “ups and downs of our history, our rise and fall, our progress or

³⁵Benlahcene, “Malek Bennabi’s Concept and Interdisciplinary,” 55-71.

³⁶Ahmad and Benlahcene, “A 20th Century Civilization Discourse,” 1-16.

³⁷Benlahcene, *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations*, 35.

³⁸S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Islāmī Tahdhīb Aur Uskey Usūl-o-Mubādī* (Understanding Islamic Lahore: Islamic Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1996), 10-11.

³⁹Ibid., 11-13.

⁴⁰Fulla Al-Ahmar, *Sayyid Qutb and Malik Bennabi’s Thought: Comparison and Contrast* (2006). Retrieved April 8, 2020 www.hoggar.org

decay...are controlled by the same unavoidable and indiscriminate law of God."⁴¹ Thus, in Mawdūdī's paradigm, it is imperative to have the deep analysis of man's relation with "God's Law" in order to examine the rise and fall of nations and civilizations. In view of Mawdūdī's analysis, the present wretched conditions of the Muslim nations are due to their negative relation with the "God's Law".

In contrast to Bennabī, Mawdūdī's understanding of civilizational progress in real sense has exclusively to do with Islam, as he believed that a *civilised* society can only be created through adopting the Islamic principles. The elements of civilization, according to Mawdūdī, will function positively if they are based on the Islamic values because all *other* values are corrupt and reflect temporary glory of *jahiliyyah*. Since, Mawdūdī was more concerned about the *systemic* methodology; therefore, he linked civilizational elements with the articles of faith and presented a political articulation of the same.⁴²

For Bennabī, moral factor (*khulq*) is the essence of civilization. In the absence of moral factor, a civilization would not be able to create the civilising milieu. Thus, political, economic, social and educational crises are basically the manifestations of the moral crisis- the real and core crisis. In other words, everything other than morality (linked to religion) is a product of civilization, impotent to create a civilizational change. Therefore, civilizational renewal has to start with morality.⁴³ Mawdūdī endorses Bennabī's correlation of morality and civilizational renewal; however, his extensive deliberations on the political contextualization of Islam have undermined the scope of his moral observations. According Mawdūdī, Islamic civilization is fundamentally based on the religious values. He affirms that the basic goal towards which the Holy Qur'ān calls mankind is not the material development or scientific progress, rather it is the faith (*īmān*). Because faith, he further argues, builds a value-based human character in a morally upright culture. It unites people by giving them a *common* purpose, thought and action. For Mawdūdī, the moral code (*nizām al-ikhlāq*) of Islam is universal and it ranges from the details of domestic life upto the field of international relations. This universality, in Mawdūdī's view, is a necessary condition for the progress of civilizations. He further argues, when Islamic civilization lost its moral system it, eventually, lost its original greatness.⁴⁴

4.2. Concept of Religion

Bennabī accepts the Khaldūnian view that the rise and fall of societies is primarily due to changes in their religious beliefs and ideas. Commitment to "moral function" of religion, Bennabī affirms, is the prerequisite condition for the rise of civilizations. He argues that religion functions like a "compound" that combines man, soil and time (three primary elements of civilization) and provides them *direction* to start and streamline the cycle of civilization.⁴⁵ According to Benlahcene, religion is a "pivotal coefficient" in Bennabī's civilizational equation.⁴⁶ It functions as a *catalyst* and a provider of the milieu wherein the other civilizational elements dynamically synthesize. Bennabī argues that it has been proved by the historical analysis that "all civilizations have their roots in religious sentiments."⁴⁷ Thus, the Buddhist civilization has its roots in Buddhism, the Muslim civilization in Islam and the Western civilization in Christianity. For Bennabī, even "communist

⁴¹S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam* (New Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī Publishers, 2009).

⁴²S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Tahrīk-i Islāmī kī Ikhlāqī Bunyādīan* (New Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī Publishers, 2005).

⁴³Fawzia Barium, "Malik Bennabi and Intellectual Problems," 325-337.

⁴⁴See, S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*.

⁴⁵Fawzia Barium, "Malik Bennabi and Intellectual Problems," 325-337.

⁴⁶Benlahcene, *The Socio-Intellectual Foundations*, 49.

⁴⁷Mālek Bennabī, *Ta'ammulāt* (Contemplations) (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), 198.

civilization” is basically a problem of Christian civilization since founding fathers of communism (Engels and Marx) have actually delinked genesis of the communist ideology from the cycle of Christian civilization.⁴⁸ While accentuating the role of religion in the making of civilization, Bennabī asserts, civilization is born twice, “first when the religious idea is born, and second when the idea becomes recorded in souls, and is entered into the events of history.”⁴⁹

Mawdūdī, endorsing Bennabī, also recognizes the *centrality* of religion, however, in a politically conceptualized *systemic* framework. For Mawdūdī, religion is a “total scheme of life”, a “revolutionary ideology” and a “dynamic movement” that controls the direction of social change. His approach to religion is *totalistic*, producing rational interdependence of Islamic morality, law, and political theory.⁵⁰ Mawdūdī strongly criticised the confluence of traditional mystic positions on defining the role of religion; as a mere source of ecstatic experiences and produced a socio-politically functional elucidation of religious themes. He argues, the Qur’ānic term for religion is *dīn* which connotes “the complete way of life.” It is composed of four factors: (i) supreme authority; (ii) submission to such authority; (iii) the system of thought and action established through exercising that authority; and, (iv) retribution meted out by that authority, in consideration of loyalty and obedience to it, or rebellion and transgression against it.⁵¹ In contrast to orthodox interpretations, for Mawdūdī, *shari’ah* is the law of the state (religious state) and ‘ibādah (worship) amounts to submitting to that law. To underline the correlation between religion and politics, he symbolized the relation as “roots with the trunk and the branches with the leaves [of a tree].”⁵²

Bennabī emphasized the significance of religion in the movement of society towards civilizational progress. He argues, structural construction of any civilization cannot be based solely on the development of art, science and technology, since the nature and development of “social relationships” depend on the spiritual relation between man and God. Implying, religion is the motivation that reinforces the social relations, organizing society to take over its historical and social function, and strengthen its purpose through a shared spiritual bonding.⁵³ He acknowledges the significance of correlating the religious factors with social associations and ascertains that any disequilibrium in that construction will lead to degeneration of civilization. Bennabī also highlighted the role of *messengers* (divinely chosen religious leaders) in the making of Islamic civilization. For Bennabī, while founders of Western civilization are the Greek and Roman artists, the Islamic civilization is led by the prophets and messengers. Bennabī explains the fact that the religious principles taught by the prophets under *divine* scriptural guidance promote best kind of morals within the society. Nevertheless, he argues, the Muslims were not able to maintain the continuity of their civilizational magnitude as they failed to allow religion to perform its “social function”.

Mawdūdī, by contrast, stressed the role of religion towards establishing the Law of God. For Mawdūdī, a major cause of the entire circle of societal problems is the corrupt political leadership. Supporting his argument, Mawdūdī quotes evidence from a historical idiom, “people stand by the religion of their rulers.”⁵⁴ He argues, unless the Muslims have a “pious leadership”, the Muslim societies would not be able to revive. By referring to “pious leadership”, he actually meant the

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Fawzia Barium, “Social Change as seen by Malek Bennabi,” *American Journal of Islam and Society* 8, no. 1 (1991):189-164.

⁵⁰Maryam Jameelah, “An Appraisal of Some Aspects of Mawlana Sayid Abu ‘Alā Mawdūdī’s Life and Thought,” *Islamic Quarterly* 31, no.2 (1987):127.

⁵¹S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *The Four Basic Qur’ānic Terms*, 124-132.

⁵²Nasr, *Mawdūdī and the Making*, 82.

⁵³Fulla, “Sayyid Qutb and Malik Bennabi’s Thought.”

⁵⁴S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Tahrīk-i Islāmī kī Ikhlāqī Bunyādīan* (New Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī Publishers, 2005).

political leadership that will establish the Law of God in its true spirit. He believed Islam as a source of “the just politics” which, consequently, constructs a society wherein all social associations are formulated on the basis of *divine* balance. Mawdūdī endorses Bennabī’s observation on the role of prophets in the making of Islamic civilization. He asserts, the belief in messengers is “the soul and source of vitality” and “distinguished characteristic” of Islamic civilization.⁵⁵ Mawdūdī claims that the civilizations built by the prophets are universal, altruistic and free from potential human corruptions such as bigotry, hypocrisy, and, prejudice because prophets are under continuous Divine supervision. And, prophethood enjoys opulence of religious sanctity.⁵⁶ However, endorsing Bennabī’s analysis, Mawdūdī argues that Islamic civilization, despite having distinctive social and moral character of prophethood, could not uphold its greatness. The reason, according to Mawdūdī, was that the Muslim political leaders abandoned the political methodology of the prophets (that is *khilāfah*) which was rooted in the *unconditional sovereignty* of God and the *unconditional servitude* of man. This was a catastrophic transition of the Muslim polity from *khilāfah* to *mulūkiyah* (kingship).⁵⁷

4.3. Concept of Revival

Bennabī believed that the Muslim decadence is *curable* since it has inherent properties of renewal. His central concern, therefore, was to identify those properties and develop a framework initiating a new cycle of growth. He believes that there is paramount need to understand and talk about the “duties” of man (Muslims in particular context) rather than “rights”. He asserts that the sense of “duties” has more to do with the modification of person’s individual and social behaviour.⁵⁸ If the “duties” are paid due consideration, then, despite all the obscurantisms, *maraboutisms*, and colonialisms, the revival of the Islamic civilization will begin its course of action. Bennabī repeatedly quotes the Qur’ānic phrase: “Verily, God will never change the condition of a people until they change it themselves” to support his argument.⁵⁹ This particular Qur’ānic principle provided him with strong evidence to conclude that “internal change,” which includes man’s understanding and commitment towards duties, should be the basis of the Muslims revival. The principle of “internal change” describes the two concepts fundamental to Bennabī’s *renaissance* thought. The first concept is his belief that the effect of “colonizability” will end as a result of “internal change,” determining psychological response of the *colonized* to the *colonizer*. On practical level, the process of “internal change” includes mobilization of human and material resources. The second concept is that, besides material elements, there are transcendental elements that play a significant role in the process of change on all levels: individual, societal, and historical. To put it in Bennabīan words, “behind the close reasons of historical events, there are far-reaching ones.”⁶⁰ Bennabī asserts that the initial voices of revivalist movement represented by intellectuals such as Jamāl al- Dīn Afghānī, Arslān al-Kawākibi, Ahmad Rīdā and Muḥammad ‘Abdu, failed to produce any remarkable social change. These representatives of the Muslim revivalist movement lacked methodological approach vis-à-vis

⁵⁵S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Islāmī Tahdhīb Aur Uskey Usūl-o-Mubādī* (Understanding Islamic Lahore: Islamic Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1996), 193.

⁵⁶Ibid., 95-96.

⁵⁷See, S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Kilafat-o-Mulukiyyat* (The Caliphate and Kingship) (Lahor: Idara Tarjumanul Qur’ān Pvt. Ltd. 1992).

⁵⁸Mālek Bennabī, “The Conditions of the Renaissance,” Trans. Asma Rashid, in *Islamic Studies*, 36, no.4 (1997): 643-655.

⁵⁹Ar-Ra’ad 13:11

⁶⁰Fawzia Bariun, “Malik Bennabi’s Life and Theory of Civilization,” (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Michigan, 1988), 161.

initiating the cycle of change. Bennabī posits that instead of recognizing the “internal problem” these revivalists frequently criticized the external factors.⁶¹

Mawdūdī extensively wrote on the *revivalism* discourse. Like Bennabī, Mawdūdī traces the origin of his revivalist thought in the Holy Qur'ān by admitting that “we aspire for Islamic renaissance on the basis of the Holy Qur'ān.”⁶² According to Nasr, at the heart of Mawdūdī’s approach (to Islamic revivalism) was his strong belief that revival of Islam (*iḥyā al-Islām*) is the only panacea to solve the wide-ranging problems of the Muslim world.⁶³ Mawdūdī asserts that the revival of Islamic civilization depends on the present *attitude* of the Muslims towards Islam. He believes “individual transformation” is important. Nevertheless, he called it first step towards the revival process. The next step, in Mawdūdī’s methodology, is to “to rejuvenate Islam as a movement (including social and political domains of Muslim life) and to revive the meaning of the word Muslim anew.”⁶⁴ For that reason, Mawdūdī established a religio-political movement- *Jammāt-i Islāmi*. Mawdūdī defined his revivalist endeavours in terms of the Islamic concept of *tajdīd* (revival). He applied *tajdīd* not just as a pure religious doctrine but, according to Nasr, as a historical paradigm to relate political demands to faith, mobilize the Muslims, and, above all, claim the authority to reinterpret and rationalize the Islamic faith.⁶⁵ Mawdūdī, endorsing Bennabī, also criticized the earlier reformers such as Mujaddid Alaf al-Thānī Shaykh Sarhindī and Shah Waliullah Muḥadith Dehlavī for their asystematic approach, more inclination towards *taṣṣawuf* (mysticism) and not transforming their revivalist thought into a movement.⁶⁶ His critique was that these intellectuals neglected their revivalist efforts and got stuck into their *miraculous* claims which added to the problem of the Muslim decline in collective thought and action.⁶⁷

5. Conclusion

Both of the thinkers, Mālek Bennabī and Syed Mawdūdī, faced the two major challenges. The first challenge was of *internal* nature, conceptualized by Bennabī as “colonizability”. The second challenge was of *external* nature, conceptualized by Mawdūdī as “modern ignorance”. In the discussion of this paper, we found converging as well as diverging points between Bennabī and Mawdūdī. The major point of convergence between Bennabī and Mawdūdī is that both of them challenged *conformism* (*taqlīd*) and engagingly called the Muslim mind for *self-criticism* i.e. the starting pointing of de-colonization. Both of them argued that *renaissance* is impracticable until the Muslims revive and reform *religion* as the guiding principle of thought and action. For both, wholesale uncritical imitation of the West is not panacea to the Muslim decadence, because the Muslim *problem* is not “intrinsic problem of Islam”. Both Bennabī and Mawdūdī argued that the Muslim *problem* is essentially the problem of “nature of relation” between the Muslims and Islam. Thus, the Muslims need to make serious efforts to *revive* their relation with Islam morally, intellectually and scientifically. They need to adopt religion as the source of “social function” and “moral direction”. The major point of divergence between Bennabī and Mawdūdī is the method. Mawdūdī’s method is more of “materialistic activism-based” in nature while as Bennabī’s method is more of “intellectualistic activism-based” in nature. The former’s end objective is “political

⁶¹Fawzia Barium, “Malik Bennabi and Intellectual Problems,” 325-337.

⁶²See, Muhammad Yusuf, *Maududi: A Formative Phase* (New Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī Publishers, 1979).

⁶³Nasr, *Mawdūdī and the Making*, 54.

⁶⁴S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *Musalmān aur Mawjūdah Siyāsī Kashmakash*, Vol. 3 (New Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī Publishers, 1940), 31.

⁶⁵Nasr, *Mawdūdī and the Making*, 40.

⁶⁶See, S. A. A. Mawdūdī, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam*, Trans., Al-Ash'aři (Tajdīd Wa Iḥyā-o-Dīn) (New Delhi: Markazī Maktaba Islāmī Publishers, 2009).

⁶⁷Ibid.

transformation” of the system while as the latter’s end objective is “intellectual transformation” of the individual. To synthesize, *renaissance* has to be an *evolutionary* process, starting with Bennabī “moral transformation of the individual” and ending with Mawdūdī’s “moral transformation of the system”. Nevertheless, while integrating Mawdūdī’s political ideas with Bennabī’s intellectual and moral transformation, one has to be careful. In Mawdūdī’s political discourse, there are certain ideas which, if not contextualized, might lead to political extremism.

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