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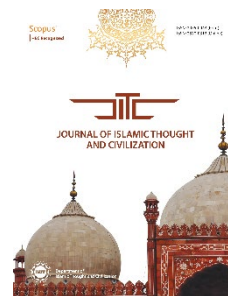| | |
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# Exploring Civilization:
## Analyzing Siraj Munir's Conception of Islamic Civilization

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## Abstract

The current study provides the contextual background of the multifaceted and ever-evolving concept of civilization, tracing its origins and evolution in the field of social sciences along with its use in the Islamic context as well as its application in the pre-partition Indian subcontinent. The focus remains on the perspectives of Pakistani scholars regarding the notion of Islamic civilization with a specific emphasis on the ideas of Siraj Munir. The author classified the diverse perspectives of Pakistani scholars into three distinct categories namely materialists, fundamentalists, and idealists. Siraj Munir's views are situated within the idealist category. Through an in-depth analysis, the author provides a comprehensive examination of Munir's ideas regarding the definition, formation, components, evolution, differences, and rise and fall of civilizations, as well as his articulation of Islamic and Pakistani civilizations. The current study offers a nuanced and critical understanding of the concept of civilization, providing valuable insights for scholars and researchers in the field.

*Keywords*: civilization, culture, Islamic civilization, Siraj Munir, *tehzeeb*

## Introduction

The study of civilizations is enriched with history and the earliest communities that were discovered back to 6,000 years ago.[1] However, the concept of "civilization" as a whole is relatively modern. Since this discipline's birth, sociologists studied civilizations and the idea of civilization.[2] In reality, even a brief perusal of Ibn e Khaldun's work, the father of sociology, reveals a careful analysis of civilizations.[3] The study of civilizations was mostly conducted using historical and archaeological techniques up to the end of 19th century. Amidst colonial expansion, the idea of civilization developed beyond a straightforward definition of the word to become an ideal. The term was often used as a tool to differentiate between cultures; superior cultures were "civilized" while those deemed inferior were labeled as "barbaric" or "savages."[4]

The development of modern ideas and intellectual achievements in the West may be traced back to the invention and usage of a few essential phrases that serve as common denominators throughout the Western European languages according to Émile Benveniste, who examined this linguistic fact

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[1]Rushton Coulborn, *Origin of Civilized Societies* (Princeton University Press, 1959).

[2]Chris Jenks, *Culture: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003).

[3]Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).

[4]Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Modern world-System as a Civilization," *Thesis Eleven* 20, no. 1 (1988): 70-86.

in his work.[5] "Civilization" is one of these concepts. The sociological history of civilization reveals a rich and nuanced narrative that was exploited as an instrument of oppression and liberation, formed by power conflicts, cultural influences, and altering social ideals.[6]

The concept of civilization was challenged during the 20th century by significant events, such as the global economic recession of the 1930s, the First World War in the 1910s, and the Second World War (1939-1945) with the accompanying Jewish holocaust.[7] The comparative studies of civilizations was previously a popular field of research and it was not until the end of the 20th century and the publication of Samuel P. Huntington's influential work *The Clash of Civilizations* that the topic regained academic attention. The dissemination of Huntington's ideas, the international political climate, and the increasing threat of fundamentalist terrorism sparked ongoing debates and brought the concept of civilization back to the forefront of discourse.[8] Sociologists and anthropologists also began using the term "civilization" in various contexts and disciplines, restoring its former significance. The concept of civilization has a long history, however, it continues to evolve and remains difficult to be defined due to its complex usage.

The idea that religion serves as the foundation of civilizations is not new or recent one. Victor de Riqueti, Marquis de Mirabeau, an 18th-century French economist and physiocrat, is cited as the first person to express the relationship between religion and civilization in his work "Ami des hommes, ou Traité de la population" (1756–58; "The Friend of Man, or Treatise on Population"), stating that "religion is, without doubt, humanity's first and most useful constraint, that is, it is the mainspring of civilization."[9] Religion played a significant role in shaping people's identities for thousands of years and it continues to do so. Even in a modern, seemingly secular country, roughly two-thirds of the population consider themselves first and foremost Muslims, following Turkish customs rather than any other.[10] A millennium ago, Crusaders risked their lives in the name of Jesus and God in "infidel lands." Today, Palestinian youths are sacrificing their lives daily in the same lands, however, this time in the name of Allah and His Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*). It is clear that religions have frequently been the defining factors for civilizations. Sociologist and historian Rushton Coulborn explained the importance of religion in the development of civilizations as, "Religion was the positive, the human-mental, agency of the primary civilized societies, and it has been so in the creation, or re-creation of all civilized societies."[11] This is why people refer to "Christian civilization" or "Islamic civilization," recognizing that each religion carries its own distinct civilization.

The current study is based on a comprehensive literature review of scholarly works that examine the concept of civilization, its evolution, and application in the Islamic context, along with its use in the pre and post-partition Indian subcontinent. The author employed a qualitative research approach to categorize the diverse perspectives and used a critical analysis in order to provide an in-depth examination of Munir's ideas on the definition, formation, components, evolution, differences, rise

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[5]Emile Benveniste, "Civilization: A Contribution to the History of the Word," *Problems in General Linguistics* (1971): 289-313.

[6]Bruce Mazlish, "Civilization in a Historical and Global Perspective," *International Sociology* 16, no. 3 (2001): 293-300.

[7]Mehdi Mozaffari, "The Transformationalist Perspective and the Rise of a Global Standard of Civilization," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 1, no. 2 (2001): 247-264.

[8]Roger Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2003).

[9]Bruce Mazlish, *Civilization and Its Contents* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 5.

[10]"World Values Survey Association," WVS Database, accessed January 30, 2023, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSParticipants.jsp?INID=44.

[11]Coulborn, *Origin of Civilized Societies,* 174.

and fall of civilizations along with his articulation of Islamic and Pakistani civilizations. This research draws on a variety of primary and secondary sources including scholarly articles, books, and other relevant documents. The rationale for this research was to contribute to the academic discourse on the concept of civilization by offering a nuanced and critical understanding of the perspectives of Pakistani scholars on the notion of Islamic Civilization, particularly the ideas of Siraj Munir (1951-1990).

Some scholars reviewed this discourse and little could be found on this debate in the scholarly journals. An Urdu article in a research journal provides a mere listing of some books and thesis written on Islamic civilization in Pakistan.[12] However, neither do the authors analyze or categorize these works, nor do they compare them. Moreover, they missed some of the most influential works in their listing. Some works provide a historical overview of Islamic civilization in the subcontinent, however, it does not involve any discourse analysis.[13] Few studies analyze the notion of Islamic civilization in Pakistan from a purely political angle.[14] No research as per the current study discussed Siraj Munir's work from this or any other perspective.

## 2. Islamic Civilization

The term civilization has been translated into various fashions in the Arabic language including words, such as *Adab, Madaniyah, Tamaddun, Hazarah, Saqafah,* and *Tahzeeb. Adab* refers to behaviors and manners. Therefore, civilization refers to all the behaviors and manners that Muslims displayed over time in economic, political, and social contexts. The root word *madana* gives rise to the nouns *madaniyah* and *tamaddun* which literally means "civilization" or "city-based culture" or "culture of the city." The word *tamaddun* was first used by Arab writers including Jurji Zaydan in his book, *Tarikh al-Tamaddun al Islami* (History of Islamic Civilization), published in 1902-1906. After this period, the word *tamaddu*n was widely used by Muslims.[15] *Hazarah* and *Saqafah* are also translated as culture.[16] The concept of an Islamic civilization emerged in the late period of the Ottoman Empire amid processes of secularization and modernization. In the 1870s, the Young Ottomans put forward this idea which was later promoted by Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876- 1909) for political purposes, such as pan-Islamism. Jamal Uddin Afghani was the main propagator alongside Sultan.[17] The concept of an Islamic civilization was seen as a counterpoint to European and other civilizations.[18]

In the Indian subcontinent, civilization and its related discussions started from Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's time, after the arrival of British in the country. The word that became famous here for

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[12]Jawad Haseeb, and Muhammad Riaz Mahmood, "Authorship and Research work on Islamic Civilization in Pakistan: A Study of Notable Trends," *Al-Qamar,*4  2 (2021): 219-234.

[13]Burjor Avari, *Islamic Civilization in South Asia a History of Muslim Power and Presence in the Indian Subcontinent* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[14]Riaz Hassan, "Religion, Society, and the State in Pakistan: Pirs and Politics," *Asian Survey* 27, no. 5 (1987): 552-565; Sener Akturk, "Religion and Nationalism: Contradictions of Islamic Origins and Secular Nation-Building in Turkey, Algeria, and Pakistan," *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 3 (2015): 778-806.

[15]Jurji Zaydan, *Tarīkh al-Tamaddun al-Islami* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1967).

[16]Ahmad Shalby, *Al Tareekh Al Islami wa Al Hazarah Al Islamiyah* (The Islamic History and the Islamic Civilization) (Cairo: Maktaba Al Nahza Misriya, 1959).

[17]Nikkie R. Keddie, "The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghani and Abdülhamid II," *Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 1 (1966): 46-67.

[18]Katerina Dalacoura, ""Islamic Civilization" as an Aspect of Secularization in Turkish Islamic Thought," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 44, no. 3 (169 (2019): 127-149.

civilization was *Tehzeeb, Tahzib or Tazeeb* (as pronounced in Pakistan). It is a word in Arabic that refers to the process of refining or perfecting one's manners and culture along with the cultivation of a polite and sophisticated society. In a way, it is aligned with the colonial implications of civilization. It is also evident from the magazine *Tehzeeb-ul-Akhlāq*, inaugurated by Sir Syed on December 24, 1870 (still continued), dedicated to the reformation of Muslim culture in India. While explaining the aims and objectives of his magazine, Sir Syed wrote in the first edition of the magazine, "The purpose of issuing this pamphlet is to encourage the Muslims of India to adopt a perfect level of civilization so that the contempt with which civilized nations look at them must be removed and they should also be regarded as respectable and civilized nations in the world. Civilization is an English word that distinguishes between savagery and humanity."[19] Sir Syed admitted that his idea of civilization was inspired by Henry Thomas Buckle's books, a white supremacist and a justifier of enslavement of Asian nations.[20]

Notable publications of the time influenced by Sir Syed's movement include *Musalmano ki Tehzeeb* (The Civilization of Muslims) by Nawab Mohsin ul Mulk Mehdi Ali Khan and *Taraqqi o Tehzeeb e Musalmanan* (The Development and Civilization of Muslims) by Syed Ali Bilgrami. These publications supported the famous "two-nation theory" presented by Sir Syed after his disillusionment with Hindu-Muslim unity. He proposed that Hindus and Muslims are two distinct and separate nations, with different religions, cultures, and social customs. Therefore, they could not coexist within a single nation-state. It was because British colonial rule in India had created a system of social, economic, and political inequalities that favored the Hindus over the Muslims. To overcome this, he believed that the Muslims needed to unite and establish their own separate nation, as being a minority in India they could not protect their interests and identity within a Hindu-dominated political system. However, in these publications, the idea of Muslim civilization remained within the boundaries of sub-continent.

A political and ideological rift developed regarding the Muslims' sense of national identity as the independence movement progressed. Some supporters advocated for a distinct national identity for Muslims that cut beyond physical and geopolitical boundaries. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal wrote poetry and prose to promote this notion.[21] Syed Abul A'ala Maududi (1903-1979), famed for his book *Masla e Qaumiyat* (The Problem of Nationhood), was one among the academics who agreed with this viewpoint. On the other hand, a group of conventional and orthodox experts argued that United India's citizens as a whole constituted a country and that civilization was influenced by linguistic, racial, and geographic characteristics. They included Sayyid Hussain Ahmed Madani (1879-1957).[22]

A decade after Pakistan's establishment, various regional crises and global events led to a resurgence of the debate over the idea of Islamic culture and civilization. Questions surrounding Pakistani identity, such as what it means to be a Pakistani, the culture of Pakistan, and whether Pakistani culture and Islamic culture are the same, were raised by ethnic and linguistic separatist groups in both East and West Pakistan. Previous conceptions about Islamic civilization were called

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[19]Hamid Hassan Qadri, *Dabistan e Tareekh e Urdu* (The Garden of History of Urdu) (Karachi, 1966).

[20]Muhammad Shafay Kidwai, Sir Sayyid's Contribution to Journalism with special Reference to the Aligarh Institute Gazette and the *Tahzibul Akhlāq* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 2005). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10603/65465.

[21]Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[22]Muhammad Moj, *The Deoband Madrassah Movement: Countercultural Trends and Tendencies* (London: Anthem Press, 2015).

into question after the rise of Arab nationalism. Numerous perspectives on these issues were offered throughout this discourse.

These perspectives are classified into the following three broad categories.

### 2.1. The Materialists

On one extreme of the spectrum, those who adopted a modern skeptical viewpoint and completely denied the idea of an Islamic civilization were termed as materialists. This perspective holds that Islam borrowed its system of literature and moral virtues from pre-Islamic Arabia, its jurisprudence from Judaism, its theology and philosophy from Greece, its legal system from the Romans, its architecture from the Byzantines, and its mysticism from Christianity. Moreover, it also upholds that Islamic civilization is nothing more than a mishmash of components from other civilizations. These people held that the origin of civilization could only be drawn from terrestrial materials and that it was governed by only material and physical realities, not by any higher principles. Syed Sibt Hassan's book *Pakistan mein Tehzeeb ka Irtiqa* (The Evolution of Civilization in Pakistan) and Dr. Wazir Agha's publications were the main sources for this viewpoint.

The Evolution of Civilization in Pakistan by Syed Sibt Hassan's preface states that the author "regards Marxism as the first and essential concept to understand history and from this perspective, past has been reviewed here."[23] According to Syed Sibt Hassan, civilizations are composed of four factors that are important in descending order, that is, geophysical factors, tools and technology, thinking systems, and social values. Hassan adopted a historical materialism-influenced point of view, according to which the system of thinking is determined by material circumstances rather than the other way around. Human consciousness has evolved in phases, starting with the knowledge of one's local surroundings, moving on to the awareness of one's own connections and limitations therein, and finally reaching a comprehension of the cosmos. Before this, how people interacted with nature was a lot like how animals interacted with it. Humans created tools and instruments to meet more complicated requirements and formed a division of work that included both physical and intellectual labor. It is claimed that consciousness, which is the perception of things outside the human mind, whether they are material or immaterial, is influenced by social circumstances.[24] Hasan determined no relationship between the ideological allies, that is, West, Germany, and US or Cuba and the USSR at the level of civilization. Moreover, he also held that physical location is the cornerstone of civilizational unity.[25]

Dr. Wazir Agha was a literary critic who also published a few writings on civilization. He frequently substituted "culture" for "civilization." He went into great detail on the subject in his writing *Culture ka Masla* (The Issue of Culture). Agha viewed lifestyle, rituals, celebrations, seasonal events, festivals, business jargon, standards for success or failure, and a propensity to absorb from the environment as examples of the outer features of society that make up civilization.[26] He went beyond Syed Sibt e Hasan to draw a contrast between the physical and spiritual aspects of civilization. Agha, however, did not view civilization as having a philosophical or transcendental view of reality. He maintained that the psychological dynamics of civilization, which included, "displays of worship,

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[23]Sibt e Hasan, *Pakistan Mein Tehzeeb Ka Irtiqa* (The Evolution of Civilization in Pakistan) (Karachi: Maktaba-e-Daniyal, 1989), 2.

[24]Ibid., 36.

[25]Ibid., 12.

[26]Wazir Agha, "Culture Ka Masla," (The issue of Culture) in *Tanqeed Aur Ehtisab* (Critique and Accountability) (Lahore: Jadeed Nashireen, 1968), 299.

rituals, and procedures for survival and acquisition of pleasure," or the Freudian life-and-death drives that underlie human behavior, were instead the essence of civilization.[27]

## 2.2. The Fundamentalists

On the other end of the spectrum, there is a second point of view that identifies a purportedly "pure Islam." This viewpoint holds that in terms of real religion, all types of civilizations are misdirected and erroneous. The well-known Islamic philosopher Abul Ala Maududi was a strong supporter of this hypothesis. He thought that "Islamic norms and rituals" must be substituted for everything "Indian/Hindu" (or, for that matter, "Western") that was popular in Pakistani culture and society. This viewpoint is also present in "Pakistani Way of Life," written by Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, but in a milder form.[28]

Ishtiaq advocated for a purified version of Pakistani culture that utterly disregards the nuances of the cultural contributions made by the nation's many religious, ethnic, sectarian, and sub-sectarian groupings over time. Based on a tiny upper-middle-class elite that was neither historically orthodox nor liberal modernist, it presents an abstract vision of Pakistani civilization. The attention of writers like these was based on Islamic apologetics according to Orientalist Peter Hardy.[29] The expansion of the Arab economy following the discovery of oil was another element that helped to shape this viewpoint. Adherents of this point of view, perhaps unintentionally, ended up imitating Arab culture, particularly that of the wealthier Arab nations, in their pursuit of "pure Islam."

According to Hassan Askari, "This leads them to reject [as non-Islamic] the contributions that Muslims made to the world culture [that] include the Alhambra of Andalusia, the Taj Mahal of India, the poetry of Alif Laila, and Mir and Ghalib along with the work of scholars and Sufis, such as Amir Khosrow (1253-1325) and Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325)."[30] This mode of thinking, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, renders it impossible to consider Islam to be a civilization at all. If this viewpoint were accurate, there would be no Islamic civilization left to be "revived" in the twenty-first century.[31]

## 2.3. The Idealists

Some individuals view the dynamic and effective element of civilization as an intangible representation of metaphysical concepts of reality. The most significant element of a civilization is not its physical structures or material resources but the incorporeal and theoretical concepts that underlie its identity. These include Hasan Askari (1919-1978), Prof. Karrar Hussain (1911–1999), Saleem Ahmed (1927-1983), Jamal Panipatti (1927-2005), Jameel Jalibi (1929-2019), and Dr. Syed Abdullah (1906-1986). Dr. Syed Abdullah has outlined the fundamental premise of the school of thought to which they subscribe in his book. According to this perspective, every civilization has an

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[27]Ibid., 300.

[28]Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *The Pakistani Way of Life* (Saddar Karachi, Pakistan: Royal Book Co., 1988).

[29]Cyril H. Philips, and Peter Hardy, "Modern Muslim Historical Writing on Medieval Muslim India," in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 307.

[30]Mir Taqi Mir (1723-1810) and Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869) are among the greatest Urdu poets and the pioneers who gave shape to the Urdu language itself. Nizamuddin Auliya (1238-1325) was Sufi saint of the Chishti Order, and is one of the most famous Sufis from the Indian Subcontinent. Amir Khosrow (1253-1325) was his disciple who is famous as a musician and poet; Hassan Askari, Tareekhi Shaoor, In *Takhleeqi Amal aur Usloob (Creative process and the manner)* (Karachi: Nafees Academy, 1989), 17-18.

[31]Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2002), 187.

inner essence, and thus, the outlook or style of national civilization cannot be altered unless there is a change or revolution at the internal level of ideas or beliefs. Civilization is a complex and dynamic entity that is shaped by the underlying beliefs, values, and ideas. Therefore, in order to transform the outlook of a civilization, one must focus to change the fundamental ideas and beliefs that shape the culture of that society. This may require a revolution or significant shift in the way people think about themselves, their society, and the world around them.[32]

The most prolific writer on the topic of civilization among them was Siraj Munir, whose work would be discussed in detail in the current study.

### 3. Siraj Munir's Concept of Civilization

Siraj Munir, who passed away at quite a young age of 39 years, was a thinker and scholar who made important contributions to Pakistani culture and civilization studies, traditionalist philosophy, and literary criticism. He was a poet, orator, broadcaster, and editor. Moreover, he was well-versed in both contemporary Western and Eastern thoughts and sciences. He also had a comprehensive grasp of languages, arts, astronomy, traditional medicine, photography, and philosophy. From 1984 until his passing in 1990, he served as the Director-General at *Idara i Saqafat i Islamia* (Institute of Islamic Culture), Lahore. He devoted a significant portion of his writing and research to the study of literature, philosophy, and civilization, particularly in relation to Islamic civilization. During his lifetime, two volumes of his writings—*Kahani ke rang* (the colors of story) and *Millat-i-Islamia: Tehzeeb-o-taqdeer (Islamic Nation: The Civilization and the Fate),* were released. The third, *Maqalat-i-Siraj Munir*, was released posthumously by Karachi's Academy Bazyaft. He was influenced by figures, such as Sheikh Akbar Mohi-ud-Din Ibn Al-Arabi (1165-1240), Sheikh Sarhindi (1564-1624), Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Dr. Burhan Ahmed Farooqi (1904-1995), Syed Hossein Nasr (1933-), Saleem Ahmed (1927-1983), and Hassan Askari (1919-1978). He also derived motivation from the ideas of Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), René Guénon (Abdul Wahid Yahya) (1886-1951), and Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Sirajuddin) (1909-2005) in shaping his thought.[33]

In Urdu, there is a sizable corpus of writing on topics related to civilization and culture including what has already been covered. Nevertheless, Siraj Munir wrote about these topics in a unique and thorough manner. All of his thought and action in the last years of his life was devoted to this fundamental problem. According to him, the meaning of every activity in life is defined by what is at its center, much like *Tawāf* (a metaphorical name for circumambulating the Kaaba). For Siraj Munir, this center was civilization. In addition to delving into the main causes of civilization, he also covered its procedures of emergence, its creation, the influence of human nature on the development of civilizations, and the effects of cultural context. Siraj Munir's mind was broad and profound, influenced by fine arts, society, history, philosophy, and anthropology, all of which are necessary to completely comprehend the concept of civilization.

### 3.1. Defining Civilization

Given the size of this academic discipline, it is understandable that the phrase has grown to be a little ambiguous. This ambiguity, according to Siraj Munir, has made it challenging to construct a commonly accepted definition of civilization.[34] However, the previous definitions of civilization, which were based on Western civilization's viewpoints, similarly misrepresented Islamic civilization.

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[32]Syed Abdullah, *Culture ka Masla* (The Issue of Culture) (Lahore: Sang e Meel Publication, 2001), 92.

[33]Siraj Munir, *Maqalat e Siraj Munir* (The writings of Siraj Munir) (Karachi: Academy Bazyaft, 2010).

[34]Ibid., 65.

Siraj Munir criticized the prevalent method to examine the civilizations, which tends to concentrate on the outward behavior of individuals in order to comprehend the shared experiences and meanings of that group. This method treats civilizations as a combination of human behavior and the external environment. Moreover, it also attempts to understand the relationship between the two through the principles of statics and dynamics.

Munir begins his definition with the belief that God created humans in His image and that prophets were sent throughout time and space to renew the goodness in human nature. Humans are not just rational beings, however, they also have will and passion. The rational capacity has the ability to recognize the truth through revelations. Civilization is thus, a process of refraction, or the bending of light, through which the concept of reality is passed through the prism of human existence. This process is driven by the interplay of rationality, will, and passion which results in the manifestation of civilization in a specific practical form. According to Munir, civilization arises from human actions in the context of nature and is shaped by natural dispositions. As such, it represents the modification of the concept of reality as it moves from the level of the idea to the level of human action. In this way, civilization could be understood as a result of the metamorphosis of the concept of reality through the lens of human existence.[35] The closer the conditions of civilization are to the ideals, the greater the human integration with these ideals would be. However, it is not possible for the ideals to remain in their purest form in the human social sphere. As the proportion of this mixture increases, the ideals become more human and localized in terms of the concept of reality. Ultimately, the principle underlying the phenomena of civilization is the soul of that civilization, which is the concept of reality that defines it.

### 3.2. Principle of Difference

Munir contends that despite the diversity of their particular phenomena, civilizations with a common notion of reality coheres into a bigger meta-civilization. On the other hand, even when their phenomena is similar, civilizations with diverse ideas of reality continue to be separate. Pre-Islamic Arabia and *Madinah* culture, for instance, had similar cultural traits, yet they ultimately belonged to separate civilizations because of their diverse views of reality.[36] While, the idea of reality or religion is a vital component of civilization, civilization itself is a terrestrial event, similar to the interaction between the soul and the body. Due to this, revelation or religion, just like soul, is impervious to alterations and deterioration that occurs in terrestrial occurrences. The soul, however, is prone to change and deterioration when it has a physical form and is thus subject to the rules of temporal life. This is also true for civilizations, which inevitably die out owing to the law of decline because they are temporal in nature. Islamic civilization is not immune to this process, like all other civilizations.[37]

### 3.3. Islamic Civilization

For Munir, having the knowledge of historical setting in which Islamic civilization first appeared is essential to comprehend its distinctive features. In contrast to previous civilizations, Islam was created ex nihilo, or from nothing, demonstrating the pristine nature of its beginning. Moreover, it also did not develop as a subculture inside an already-existing civilization. The Iranian, Byzantine, and Chinese civilizations were all in decline at the time of Islam's rise and Egypt's golden period of civilization had long before passed.[38]

According to Munir, the reason why early cultural manifestations of Islam differ from the later Islamic civilizations in Iran or India is because companions of the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) were

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[35]Ibid., 77.
[36]Siraj Munir, *Maqalat e Siraj Munir* 2010, 219.
[37]Ibid.
[38]Ibid., 222.

so transparent and transcendent—uncontaminated by personal will or passions. The line between civilization and religion is blurred in such a society. The human factors that generally shape civilization were not as significant as the revelation itself, the community of *Madinah*, for instance, cannot be termed a civilization in the traditional sense.[39] The prism of human nature, however, was distorted as the time and distance between the revelation and the Prophet (*SAW*) grew, which allowed for the inclusion of human needs and aspirations. This process gave rise to civilizational conditions and forms over time.

### 3.4. Assimilation in Islamic Civilization

According to certain academics, assimilation constitutes the abominable imitation known as *tashabbuh*, which is prohibited in Islamic legislation. Munir attempted to approach this topic from a civilizational viewpoint, contending that adopting a certain dress code is acceptable as long as it is not directly associated with a particular faith. There are two ways to end this association that is, either by severing the style's connection to its original sanctity or by adopting it into Islam's own system of sanctity and giving it new significance.[40] The relationship of Islamic culture with other civilizations, in Munir's view, is comparable to that of Islam with other religions. Islam does not perceive itself as a brand-new religion; rather, it aspires to complete and restore the line of faith. It supports the idea of reality in other religions by rejecting the misunderstandings brought about by human mistakes and by rescinding temporary and emergency provisions. Similar to this, Islam's civilization accepts components that are consistent with its view of reality and rejects manifestations that are the result of obvious human mistakes. With regard to the rites of pre-Islamic Arabia, the Prophet (*SAW*) adopted a similar strategy, keeping some of them in their original form, changing others, and eliminating those that were found on human mistake.[41]

Munir suggested that this principle of incorporation is also applicable to rituals. By adding a dimension of Islam's concept of reality to a ritual from another religion or civilization, it could be incorporated into Islamic civilization. An example of this process is the incorporation of *Qawwali,* a local Hindu ritual, into the Islamic civilization of the Indian subcontinent. For the fundamentalists, it amounts to inject impurities into "pure Islam." While for the materialists, there is no essential difference between the civilization before and after the Islam's assimilation process; it would just be a natural dialectic evolution in a single form.

In this way, the Prophet (*SAW*) established principles for the cultural assimilation and diffusion of Muslims in all times and places, guided by the Qur'ān to determine which civilizational manifestations align with the universal law and which are the product of human error. As Islam spread and encountered various cultural spheres, it modified or accepted their contents according to this principle, giving rise to Islamic civilizations in those regions through the process of acculturation.

### 3.5. Diversity in Islamic Civilization

Two primary factors, according to Munir, account for the temperamental variations among the civilizations that Islam fostered around the world. Firstly, no race or community can fully embody the absolute reality. Due to this reason, humanity is divided into various racial and tribal groups, each of which has its own distinct temperament, disposition, traits, and structure, reflecting the infinite manifestations of the Absolute. The second reason is that Islam welcomes all aspects of many civilizations in all their diversity and adapts to them in accordance with its conception of reality. That is why, the vibrancy in the colors of *Ajam* (a historic title used for the non-Arab population of the

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[39]Munir, *Millat-i-Islamia: Tehzeeb-o-Taqdeer,* 78.

[40]Munir, *Maqalat e Siraj Munir (Writings of Siraj Munir)*, 223.

[41]Munir, Millat e Islamiya: Tehzeeb o Taqdeer (*(Islamic Nation: The civilization and the fate)*, 87.

Middle East, usually said for the Persians), despite their apparent difference from the simplicity of Arabia, are as much Islamic as the Islamic civilization of India. If Islam had not accepted anything from these cultural contexts, it would have denied legitimate manifestations of essential human nature and potentially destabilized Islamic civilization. Due to misunderstandings about this variety, some people rejected *Ajam's* cultural expressions as being anti-Islamic, while others criticized Arabia's simplicity and called it uncivilized. Munir also pointed out that the transcendental principle ought to be the standard rather than using one terrestrial civilizational phenomenon to judge another. Just as a person's identification as a Muslim is based only on their faith, the determination of whether a civilization is Islamic or not is dependent on how it perceives reality.[42]

However, Siraj Munir firmly believes in the order of values and the ensuing order of civilizational phenomena. He argued that not all forms of civilization are equal and that not all aspects of Muslim culture could be deemed equally Islamic in the framework of Islamic civilization. While, certain aspects of civilization are more deeply entrenched in the terrestrial domain, others belong to a higher, more transcendental dimension. The degree of their relationship to the Absolute determines their order of worth. There are certain fields of science and art within the framework of religion that do not fall under the purview of civilization, since they do not derive from the dialectical relationship between the notion of reality and the human perspective but rather from trans-human sources. It is improper to identify them as a component of civilization, just as it would be improper to classify the Qur'ān as poetry, calligraphy as a movement in art, or *hikmat* as a subjective conjecture.[43]

### 3.6. Anomalies in the History of Islamic Civilization

Siraj Munir is of the view that the departure from the two guiding principles that instructed all of Islam's civilizations is what gives Spain's Islamic heritage its distinctive character. The first is that Islam absorbed and adapted to local components and cultural norms everywhere it spread, adjusting them in accordance with its understanding of reality. The second tenet is that, with the exception of Spain, none of the civilizations that Islam produced had a metropolis-like quality. Islam does not have the fundamental characteristics of a huge city or town. In contrast to other areas, the Muslims in Spain paid little attention to regional cultural traditions and did not actively work to attract the local Christian populace to Islam. Instead of integrating aspects of the local culture into their own, they instead created a political clash with them. This resulted in a civilization that was unique from others in the Muslim world, together with the fact that the Muslim community in Spain was mostly composed of African Muslims from North Africa rather than converts from the native population. They did not absorb anything from the Andalusian territory and Islam remained an outsider during their reign. Contrary to other civilizations in the Muslim world that were able to adapt and grow with time, this civilization eventually vanished.

The *Kharijites*, *Qarmatians,* and *Din e Ilahi*, for instance, are not regarded by Siraj Munir as authentic examples of Islamic civilization.[44] These kinds of occurrences are present in many Islamic civilizations across the world. The actual problem with this phenomenon, according to Munir, is a disruption in the hierarchy of priorities because when the harmony between the idea of reality and the elements of civilization is disrupted, a mistake of some kind is unavoidably made.[45]

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[42]Munir, *Millat e Islamiya: Tehzeeb o Taqdeer* (*(Islamic Nation: The civilization and the fate)*, 87.

[43]Munir, *Maqalat e Siraj Munir (Writings of Siraj Munir),* 220.

[44]The *Din e Ilahi* was a syncretic religion initiated by the Mughal emperor Akbar in 1582 drawing elements from various religions.

[45]Munir, *Maqalat e Siraj Munir (Writings of Siraj Munir),* 244.

## 3.7. Fall of Islamic Civilization

Civilization is fundamentally a terrestrial phenomenon, governed by same rules as any other terrestrial body. Resultantly, it is susceptible to the laws of space and time and unavoidably deteriorates and vanishes over time. All civilizations, including the Islamic civilization, which has likewise declined, share this trait. Islamic civilization, however, has not vanished completely, rather its center has merely moved to a new site, unlike other civilizations that have either ceased to exist or have persisted by renunciating their worldviews. It is crucial to take into account the Islamic notion of time, which Munir previously covered, in order to comprehend the idea of decline in the context of Islamic civilization.

A hadith attributed to Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) states that "The best of men are my generation, then those who come next to them, then those who come next to them."[46] This decline is inherent in the Islamic conception of history and there is no escape from it. However, when contemporary individuals discuss the decline of Islamic civilization, they often measure it against the standard of scientific progress in the Western world. From this perspective, the "first era" following the Prophet (SAW) may not be seen as a prosperous and civilized time.

## 3.8. Pakistani Civilization

Some scholars argued that Pakistani culture may be traced back to the Dravidian, Gandhara, and Indus civilizations as these ancient cultures form the basis of Pakistani civilization. Others claim that the first Muslim settlement in the area marked the beginning of Pakistani civilization. According to a third set of academics, the modern state of Pakistan was established on August 14, 1947, marking the beginning of Pakistani civilization.

An alternative viewpoint on the matter was provided by Siraj Munir, who contended that Pakistan is not a new civilization with a discrete origin that emerged after 1947, however, it is more of a political vehicle and extension of the Islamic civilization of the Indian subcontinent. He claimed that the region's pre-partition cultural heritage was already assessed and incorporated into the norms and standards of Islamic civilization after a long and complex process of cultural exchange and interaction. According to this viewpoint, Pakistani civilization must include the old civilizations of the region to the extent that they could be assimilated into Islam's idea of reality.

## 4. Conclusion

In this study, the concept of civilization and Islamic civilization as presented by Siraj Munir was examined through a comparative analysis of the competing perspectives offered by the representatives of various schools of thought. It is important to acknowledge that there may be potential errors in the interpretation of Munir's work. Those who have read his book "Millat-e-Islamia: Civilization and Destiny" are aware of the complex style in which Munir presents his ideas, making it possible for misunderstandings to occur. However, the purpose of this study was not to provide a comprehensive analysis of Munir's concepts but to offer a brief overview of his ideas in the context of a comparative analysis with other concepts. It also evaluated the viability of his notion of civilization in the contemporary global trend.

It is not possible to review the works of every writer who participated in the discourse presented in this limited research. However, those interested in this debate may refer to the contributions of Abdur Rehman Bijnori (1885-1918), Khursheed ul Islam (1919-2006), Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984), Prof. Ehtisham Hussain (1912-1972), Prof. Mumtaz Hussain (1918-1992), Prof. Karrar

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[46]Muhammad b Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahīh Al Bukhari*, Section "To make the Heart Tender," Chapter "The warning regarding worldly pleasures, amusements and competing against each other," Ḥadīth No. 6429.

Hussain (1911-1999), Dr. Ibadat Barelvi (1920-1998), and Sajjad Baqar Rizvi (1928-1992). All of them have made significant contributions to the discourse with their unique perspectives.

Further research could delve more deeply into the remaining work of Siraj Munir, exploring a range of topics he addressed, such as the epistemological critique of sociology, the archaeological division of the zones of Islamic civilization, and the dialectical analysis of modernism versus traditionalism. Additionally, the concept of civilization can be examined in more detail by synthesizing the insights of Munir with those of Hasan Askari, Saleem Ahmed, and Jamal Panipatti. Overall, the study of Munir's thought provides a valuable insight into the complex and multifaceted nature of civilization, particularly in the context of Islam and its interactions with other cultures and civilizations.

## Conflict of Interest

## Funding Details

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