Introduction to Nature and culture in western discourses{stephen horigan}

Nature refers to the physical world and its phenomena, including all living and non-living things that exist independently of human influence.

Key Features:

Exists without human intervention.

Includes elements like plants, animals, landscapes, weather, oceans, and the cosmos.

Governed by natural laws (physics, biology, chemistry).

Often viewed as the "original state" or the "default" world.

Examples:

Forests, rivers, wildlife, mountains.

Earthquakes, rain, evolution, ecosystems.

In Contrast:

Nature is what we are born into; it's not created by humans.

It represents instinct, wildness, and the untamed world.

Culture

Culture is the sum total of human intellectual, artistic, social, and moral achievements, shared by a group and passed down through generations.

Key Features:

Learned and transmitted through language, tradition, art, and behaviour.

Reflects beliefs, values, norms, rituals, and customs.

Varies widely between societies and evolves over time.

Examples:

Languages, religions, music, cuisine, fashion, traditions.

Social practices like marriage customs, greetings, festivals.

In Contrast:

Culture is created within nature but in response to it.

It is shaped by how humans interpret and interact with the natural world.

Civilization

Civilization is a complex human society characterized by urban development, social stratification, organized institutions, technological advancement, and often writing systems.

Key Features:

A more advanced or structured form of culture.

Involves state formation, governance, legal systems, economies.

Associated with cities, infrastructure, historical progress.

Examples:

Ancient Egypt, Roman Empire, Indus Valley Civilization.

Modern nation-states, political institutions, economic systems.

In Contrast:

Civilization is built on top of culture.

It's often associated with progress, but also with control over nature (e.g., agriculture, urbanization).

CULTURAL TERMS

Ethnocentrism: Believing one's own culture is superior to others.

Enculturation The process through which individuals learn their own culture.

Acculturation: Cultural change resulting from continuous contact between different cultures.

Assimilation: When one culture fully absorbs another, often the minority adopts the dominant culture.

Cultural Diffusion: The spread of cultural traits from one society to another.

Cultural Lag: When non-material culture (values, laws) lags behind material innovations (tech).

Subculture A group within a culture that has distinct values, norms, and behaviors.

Counterculture: A subculture that actively opposes the dominant culture.

Multiculturalism : A perspective recognizing the cultural diversity of a society and promoting equal standing for all cultural traditions.

Cultural Hegemony (Antonio Gramsci): The domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class's worldview.

Ritual: A formalized, repetitive action that holds symbolic meaning, often religious or cultural.

Taboo: A social or cultural prohibition against a particular behavior.

Norms: Rules or expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members.

Values: Shared beliefs about what is good, right, or important in a society

Nature and Culture in the Work of western Discourse

Levi Strauss

Lévi-Strauss and the Nature-Culture Divide

Stephen Horigan explores how Claude Lévi-Strauss revolutionized the study of culture by focusing on the deep mental structures that shape human society. At the heart of his theory is the binary opposition between nature and culture, a distinction that has shaped Western thinking for centuries. For Lévi-Strauss, nature refers to what is universal and biological – such as reproduction, hunger, or emotions – while culture is what human societies construct on top of nature: rules, norms, customs, and meanings. Horigan shows how Lévi-Strauss treats this opposition not just as a historical idea, but as a universal mental framework through which humans interpret the world.

The Incest Taboo – A Gateway into Culture

One of Lévi-Strauss's most influential ideas, as explained by Horigan, is the concept of the incest taboo as the boundary line between nature and culture. Unlike animals, human beings do not simply follow biological urges; they create rules about who can and cannot be married. The incest taboo, which exists in every known society, is not based on natural instinct but on social prohibition. This prohibition forces people to exchange partners between families and

clans, turning biological reproduction into a cultural institution. According to Lévi-Strauss, this act of creating rules — of transforming a biological potential into a social obligation — is the first true step into culture.

Culture as Structure, Not Progress

Lévi-Strauss broke away from older anthropological models that described culture as a linear evolution from "primitive" to "civilized." Instead, he argued that all societies — no matter how different — are organized by similar mental structures. Horigan emphasizes how Lévi-Strauss sees culture not as a ladder of progress, but as a horizontal field of variation, where different societies creatively express universal oppositions. Myths, kinship systems, taboos — all these are examples of how the same logic takes different forms. This approach helped dismantle the ethnocentric belief that Western societies were "more advanced" than others, showing instead that all human thought is equally complex and intelligent.

The Savage Mind — Respect for Indigenous Thought

In his book The Savage Mind, Lévi-Strauss challenges the idea that 'primitive' thought is irrational or undeveloped. As Horigan explains, he uses the metaphor of the bricoleur — the handyman who solves problems using whatever materials are available — to describe how traditional societies approach knowledge. Unlike the "engineer," who designs from a blueprint, the bricoleur works creatively with what exists. Both styles are rational and structured. This insight led Lévi-Strauss to argue that indigenous knowledge systems are not inferior to science; they are simply different. This was a powerful defense of cultural diversity and a rejection of colonialist narratives.

The Legacy and Limits of Structuralism

Horigan also addresses some criticisms of Lévi-Strauss's work. While his theory of binary oppositions and deep structures gave anthropology a scientific foundation, it also tended to overlook historical change, power dynamics, and the emotional complexity of human life. Sometimes, structuralism seems to reduce culture to a rigid mental code, rather than a living, evolving reality. However, despite these limitations, Horigan acknowledges that Lévi-Strauss fundamentally transformed our understanding of culture. He helped shift the focus of anthropology from mere description to interpretation, from surface rituals to underlying meaning, and from judgment to empathetic understanding.

The Skin of Our Teeth

Kenneth Clark

Introduction

The first chapter of Kenneth Clark's Civilisation: A Personal View, titled "The Skin of Our Teeth," is a foundational exploration of the precarious nature of Western civilization during the Dark Ages, spanning the six centuries following the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Published in 1969 as part of a companion volume to the BBC documentary series, this chapter sets the tone for Clark's broader narrative on the history of Western art, architecture, and philosophy. Drawing on historical analysis and personal reflection, Clark examines how civilization was preserved "by the skin of our teeth," emphasizing the roles of art, literacy, and key figures in its survival. This survey note provides a comprehensive breakdown of the chapter's key themes, supported by detailed insights and historical context.

Key Themes and Points

1. Fragility of Civilization

Research suggests that Clark opens the chapter by underscoring the fragility of civilization, a theme central to his narrative. He notes, "however complex and solid it seems, civilization is actually quite fragile. It can be destroyed," highlighting the narrow escape of European thought and art during the Dark Ages. This fragility is illustrated through the historical context of the fall of the Roman Empire, which left a vacuum that threatened cultural and intellectual continuity. Clark's emphasis on this point reflects his belief that

civilization is not an inevitable progression but a delicate balance that can be lost to chaos and decay.

2. Art as a Trustworthy Record

It seems likely that Clark places significant weight on art as the most reliable indicator of a society's achievements. He quotes John Ruskin: "Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts, the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last." This assertion positions art as a lens through which to understand societal values, offering a more enduring record than historical deeds or written words. Clark's focus on art aligns with his background as an art historian, setting the stage for his exploration of Western artistic heritage.

3. Cultural Contrasts and Worldviews

The evidence leans toward Clark using cultural contrasts to illustrate differing worldviews. He compares a Negro mask, which he describes as symbolizing a world of fear and darkness, with the Apollo Belvedere, representing the light and confidence of Hellenistic culture. This juxtaposition serves to highlight the diversity of human expression and the role of art in reflecting societal conditions. While this comparison may reflect the cultural perspectives of the 1960s, it underscores Clark's method of using visual artifacts to explore broader historical narratives.

4. Fall of Rome and External Pressures

Clark discusses the fall of the Roman Empire, attributing it to internal exhaustion and boredom after centuries of stagnation. He notes that this decline was compounded by external pressures, particularly

the rise of Islam, which isolated Rome and forced new civilizations to face the Atlantic. This shift marked a significant turning point, redirecting the trajectory of Western civilization toward northern Europe and the emerging medieval world. The evidence suggests this analysis reflects Clark's view on the interplay between internal decay and external forces in shaping history.

5. Role of Irish Monks in Preservation

Post-550 AD, Irish monks are highlighted as crucial to the preservation of civilization. They created intricate art in gold, often with few human references, and meticulously copied gospel books, ensuring the survival of Christian and classical texts during a period of widespread illiteracy. Clark's focus on their contributions underscores the role of religious institutions in maintaining cultural continuity, particularly in the face of Viking raids and political instability. This point aligns with historical accounts of the Celtic monasteries' influence on early medieval art and learning.

6. Sense of Permanence and Civilized Societies

Clark argues that civilization requires a sense of permanence, which he contrasts with the transient nature of early Norse societies like the Vikings. He notes that the Vikings, while influential, did not build in stone or write books, lacking the lasting structures and records characteristic of civilized societies. This sense of permanence, aided by reading and writing, allows a civilized man to feel he belongs in space and time, looking forward and back. This theme reflects Clark's broader interest in the foundations of cultural stability.

7. Literacy and the Role of Monasteries

For over 500 years, literacy was rare in Western Europe, and monasteries became the guardians of civilization. Under the Franks, particularly during the 7th and 8th centuries, monasteries preserved texts through conquest and cruelty, as Clark notes. This preservation was achieved through the efforts of figures like Alcuin of York, who collected and copied books, ensuring the survival of ancient literature. Clark mentions that only three or four antique manuscripts of Latin authors still exist, highlighting the precariousness of this preservation effort.

8. Charlemagne's Contribution to Cultural Preservation

Charlemagne's role is central to Clark's narrative, with the emperor, aided by Alcuin of York, playing a pivotal role in collecting and copying books. This effort was crucial for preserving Greek and Latin literature, with Clark noting the rarity of surviving manuscripts. His crowning in 800 AD marked a significant moment, creating a balance between spiritual and worldly powers that prevented the stagnation seen in regions like Egypt and Byzantium. This balance, lasting 300 years, facilitated cultural and artistic development.

9. Tension Between Spiritual and Worldly Powers

The crowning of Charlemagne in 800 AD created a 300-year period of tension between spiritual and worldly authorities, which Clark sees as preventing stagnation. This balance, unlike the centralized power structures of Egypt and Byzantium, allowed for dynamic cultural evolution. Clark's analysis suggests that this interplay was essential for the survival and growth of Western civilization, reflecting a nuanced view of historical power dynamics

10. Artistic Flourishing Under the Ottonian Dynasty

By the 10th century, under the Ottonian dynasty (the three Ottos), art began to flourish despite political darkness. Patrons like Lothar and Charles the Bald commissioned illuminated manuscripts, and Christian symbols, such as the crucifixion, became powerful expressions of faith and humanity. Clark highlights this revival as evidence of civilization's resilience, with art serving as a humanizing force within the church. This point underscores the chapter's focus on the interplay between art and societal conditions.

The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam"

Talal asad

🟢 1. Why Anthropology of Islam?
Asad questions how to study Islam anthropologically without reducing it to:

A timeless essence (pure religion)
A mere social construction (pure politics or culture)
Argues Islam is neither just beliefs nor just practices, but a historically formed discursive tradition.

🟢 2. Critique of Previous Approaches
Orientalist approach: Treated Islam as a static, monolithic entity.

Symbolic anthropology (e.g., Geertz): Looked for interpretive meanings but risked making Islam a mere symbolic system disconnected from power and practice.

Asad insists Islam must be seen as a living tradition sustained by power relations and historical contingencies.

🟢 3. Discursive Tradition
Proposes the key concept of discursive tradition:

A tradition is not just inherited rules, but an ongoing argument about correct practice.
Muslims engage with texts, authorities, and practices to maintain and modify what counts as Islamic.

This discursive process is shaped by:
Institutions (schools, mosques, states)
Power dynamics
Historical conditions

🟢 4. Normativity and Orthodoxy
Orthodoxy:

Not simply a doctrinal position, but a regulated practice of defining and enforcing correct belief and conduct.
Enforced by religious scholars, courts, political authorities.
Emphasizes that norms are disciplined and institutionalized.
Anthropology should study how orthodoxy is produced, debated, and contested.

🟢 5. Islam and Power
Islam is tied to:
Forms of discipline and regulation (e.g., religious education, law).
The state and broader structures of power.
Rejects the idea of Islam as only a personal faith.
Must be seen in its social and historical contexts.

🟢 6. Key Takeaways for Anthropologists
Avoid essentialist definitions ("Islam as belief in one God").
Avoid purely functionalist accounts ("Islam as cultural system").

Instead:
Study how Muslims themselves define, interpret, and contest Islam.
Analyze institutions, power relations, and historical transformations.
Be reflexive about anthropology's own concepts and biases.

🟢 7. Implications
Anthropology of Islam should:

Recognize the normative dimension of Islam (not just meaning-making).
Understand continuities and ruptures in Islamic traditions.
Examine how global and local forces shape Islamic practices.

✨ Summary in One Line
Islam is a historically formed discursive tradition whose norms and practices are continually reproduced, contested, and transformed within power relations.

1. Talal Asad's Core Arguments

📌 Islam as a Discursive Tradition
Islam is not static; it is shaped through ongoing historical conversations, practices, and moral reasoning.
Affects:
Ethical self-formation
Political power and resistance
Knowledge systems

🔶 2. Critique of Common Anthropological Views

⚠️ Problems Identified:
1. Generalization & De-historicization
Cultures are often treated as timeless and unchanging.
Islam is wrongly presented as a singular essence.
2. "Typical" vs. Institutions
Focus should shift from "typical" Muslims to changing institutions and socio-economic contexts.
3. Overly Functional Models
Reducing Islam to outcomes of economic or social structures is misleading.
Religion doesn't always reflect the social "base."

4. Instrumental View of Language
Islamic language is not just a tool of domination.
It shapes meaning, emotion, and social relationships.
5. Overuse of Simplified Categories
Terms like “tribe” or “Islamic society” are often used too vaguely.
Leads to distortion of real, diverse practices.

🔶 3. Comparison: Geertz vs. Gellner

Ernest Gellner (1925–1995)
Field: Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology
Bio Highlights:
Born in Paris; grew up in Czechoslovakia and later moved to the UK.
Professor of Philosophy, Logic, and Scientific Method at the London School of Economics; later director of the Centre for the Study of Nationalism in Prague.
He was both a philosopher and social anthropologist.
Key Contributions:
Theory of Nationalism: In his landmark book “Nations and Nationalism” (1983), Gellner argued that nationalism is a product of industrial society. He said nationalism is not natural or ancient but arises when modern economies demand cultural homogeneity.
Critique of Islam and Marxism: Explored the structure of Islamic societies and critiqued Marxist determinism.
He emphasized material and structural factors (like economic and political changes) in the formation of culture and identity.
Main Idea:
Nationalism is a modern phenomenon shaped by industrialization, not an age-old ethnic loyalty.

Clifford Geertz (1926–2006)

Field: Cultural Anthropology

Bio Highlights:
American anthropologist, primarily associated with the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.
Conducted ethnographic research in Indonesia and Morocco.

Key Contributions:

Pioneered the concept of "Interpretive Anthropology", which treats culture as a system of symbols and meanings.
In his famous essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", Geertz interpreted cultural practices as texts to be read for symbolic meaning.
In "The Interpretation of Cultures" (1973), he argued that understanding culture requires thick description—deep contextual interpretation of symbols, rituals, and meaning-making.
Focused on how people make sense of their world, rather than material or economic causes.
Main Idea:
Culture is a web of symbols people use to give meaning to their lives. Anthropologists should interpret these meanings like reading a text.

Comparison between Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner

Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner offer fundamentally different perspectives in the field of anthropology, especially concerning religion and Islam. Geertz's approach is interpretive and symbolic, focusing on meaning, ritual, and cultural performance. He views culture as a system of symbols and sees religion, including Islam, as a dramatic performance where social actors play roles within a symbolic framework. His method involves thick description—analyzing the layers of meaning behind cultural practices.
In contrast, Ernest Gellner adopts a structural and functionalist approach, emphasizing social organization, power, and modernization. He views religion more as an ideological tool that

supports social cohesion or legitimizes authority. In his analysis of Islam, Gellner presents a dichotomy between tribal and urban Islam, suggesting that different forms of the religion reflect different social structures—tribal Islam being egalitarian and segmentary, and urban Islam being hierarchical and orthodox.
Geertz is often criticized for overemphasizing performance and underrepresenting the complexity and political dimensions of religion. Meanwhile, Gellner is critiqued for ignoring the subjective, lived experiences of people, and for generalizing Islam into fixed social types. While Geertz seeks to understand what religion means to people, Gellner aims to explain how religion functions in society.

🔶 4. Talal Asad's Critique of Geertz & Gellner
Geertz: Too focused on symbolic metaphors and drama. Reduces Islamic behavior to "readable gestures", missing the voices and deeper reasoning of local Muslims.
Gellner: Views Islam as a system shaped by tribal vs. state dynamics; lacks historical nuance and treats Islamic language as a mere tool for elite control.

🔶 5. Language and Power in Islam
Islamic language carries power, ethics, persuasion, not just domination.
Must understand how Muslims use language to negotiate authority, resist, and express devotion.

🔶 6. Misuse of the Term "Tribe"
The word "tribe" is used carelessly to describe highly varied groups.
Different tribes have different:
Political roles
Economic systems
Religious practices

🔶 7. Better Anthropological Approach (Asad's View)

Contextual, historical, and critical of essentialism.
Go beyond “stories” and “characters.”
Use clear analytical tools for concepts like:
Power
Discourse
Authority

🔶 8. Example: Military Mobilization
Don’t assume tribes fight or organize based on cultural traits alone.
Look at environmental, economic, and historical changes.
🟩 Conclusion
Anthropology of Islam should:
Avoid simplifications.
Be grounded in local voices, discourses, and historical specificity.
Recognize the diversity and evolving nature of Muslim societies.
Combine ethical, political, and social analysis.

Rethinking the Anthropology of Islam: Focus on Tradition, Not Structure

1. Islam Is Not a Fixed Social Blueprint

• What it means: Many researchers try to understand Islam as a rigid system — like a fixed social model or set of behaviours.
• Author's argument: Islam is not one total, unchanging system.
• Instead: We must understand Islam as a lived, ongoing process that develops through how Muslims think, speak, and act about their religion.
• Example: A tribal Muslim in rural Pakistan may follow different rituals than a Muslim in urban Cairo. But both are part of Islam, not because of the external forms, but because both are rooted in meaningful practices connected to Islamic teachings.

2. Islam as a Discursive Tradition

• Main Idea: Islam should be seen as a "discursive tradition" – a tradition based on discussions, teachings, and interpretations centered around Qur'an and Hadith.
• Why this matters: Not everything Muslims do is "Islamic." What counts is what Muslims do as Muslims and how they connect their practices to Islamic texts and teachings.
• Example: Saying "Bismillah" before eating isn't just a habit – it's a practice taught and understood in relation to Islamic guidance. That's a discursive tradition.
• Another Example: Muslims performing prayer (ṣalāh) worldwide follow a shared pattern based on the Qur'an and Hadith, not based on any one cultural or social structure.

3. What Is a "Tradition"?

• Definition: A tradition is more than just doing something because it's old. It includes:
o A past (where it started and how it's remembered)
o A present (how it's practiced and taught today)
o A future (why it continues or is changed)
Not everything Muslims do is part of this tradition.
• Tradition is taught: through discussions and instructions – not just copied blindly.
• Example: Fasting in Ramadan continues today not just because it was done in the past, but because Muslims actively teach, explain, and reflect on its meaning and purpose every year.

4. Importance of Orthodoxy in Islam

• Orthodoxy means: not just "right belief," but the power to define what is correct practice in Islam.

• This includes: who teaches it (an imam, a scholar, a Sufi master, or a parent), and how it's enforced in the community.
• Example: If a community follows a new method of prayer, scholars may step in to say it's not valid — they are using their power to maintain orthodoxy.
• Another example: In a village mosque, the local imam warns against a new practice seen as "un-Islamic." This shows how religious authority defines what is 'correct'—a clear example of orthodoxy in action.

5. Reasoning and Argument Are Part of Tradition

• Misunderstanding: Some think tradition means people just follow blindly, without thinking.
• Truth: Tradition always involves reasoning, teaching, explaining — especially when someone doesn't understand or disagrees.
• Example: A young Muslim questions the practice of wearing the hijab. A teacher or elder explains its meaning through Hadith and reasoning, showing how traditional practice involves rational persuasion, not blind imitation.

6. Traditions Are Not Homogeneous

• Main Idea: Islam looks different in different places — and that's okay.
• Misconception: Some say this diversity means Islam is not a single tradition.
• Author's response: Different practices reflect how Islamic teachings are adapted to different historical and social contexts.
• Example: Sufis in Turkey may chant dhikr differently from those in Sudan. But both are engaging in Islamic practice rooted in tradition — just adapted differently.

7. Traditions Try to Be Coherent (But Often Face Challenges)

• Coherence means: making all parts of the tradition fit together logically.
• Challenge: Political, economic, and modern pressures (like capitalism, media, state control) often disturb this coherence.
• Example: Islamic schools may teach modesty, but global consumerism encourages flashy fashion – creating tension between tradition and modernity.

8. Studying Tradition Is Never Neutral

• Key Point: How someone writes or speaks about Islamic tradition reflects their position:
o Supportive, critical, or neutral.
• Important: Every account of tradition is influenced by the author's background and moral viewpoint.
• Example: A Western journalist might see veiling as oppression, while a Muslim scholar might see it as empowerment – both views reflect different worldviews.

• Final Message: There is no universal or politically neutral way to talk about Islamic tradition. Every representation can be debated.

Islam as one thing anything or nothing: what the Western academy gets wrong

Caner k. dagli

This article is discussing about Islam. There are some questions
Is Islam one and changing truth? Is Islam whatever muslim say it is? Can Islam even be considered a single thing?
The Article is bringing forward some thoughts of major scholars by mentioning their work.

Key Scholars and Works :

Marshall Hodgson: The Venture of Islam
Shahab Ahmed: What Is Islam?
Talal Asad: "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam"
Kevin Reinhart: Lived Islam
These scholars all explore the concept of Islam—but no one describes it in a way that most Muslims would necessarily agree with.

Hodgson's Key Ideas :

Islam vs. Islamdom vs. Islamicate:
Islam = The religion itself
Islamdom = The society where Muslims live
Islamicate = Cultural aspects (literature, art, etc.)influenced by Islam
Hodgson says Islam shared culture across the Muslim world--something not found in Christianity or Buddhism.

Contradiction in Hodson's view

Hodgson explains Islam doesn't have a fixed or eternal truth while studying historically.
He also says Islam has a strong and lasting cultural unity across time and space.
Eg:
He says anything is possible within Islam historically
But he also sets limits and creates a shared tradition across the globe.
Shahab Ahmed's View of Islam in What Is Islam?

Shahab Ahmed wrote a major book called What Is Islam? In it, he focuses on Islamic life from the Balkans to Bengal (Eastern Europe to South Asia), leaving out the Arab world and Africa. His main idea is that Islam is full of "inherent contradictions"—that is, contradictions are built into Islam itself.

Ahmed's Theory: Contradiction is a Core Part of Islam

He says that Islam is how Muslims relate to Revelation (God's message) in three ways:
Pre-Text (before the text),
Text (the Qur'an itself),
Context (how it is lived and applied).
Based on this, he argues that multiple, even contradictory truths can exist in Islam at the same time.
Ahmed argues that Islam includes opposite meanings as part of its very nature.
Eg: A man says, "We are Muslim wine-drinkers."
In Ahmed's view, this is still Islam—even if drinking wine is forbidden (haram).

By this logic, anyone could say, "We are Muslim pork-eaters" or "Muslim gamblers"—and that too would count as Islam

If anything can be Islamic—even things that break core rules—then there are no real rules at all.
Ans: Rules must be able to be broken; otherwise, they aren't rules. But if breaking a rule still counts as Islamic, then the rule loses meaning.

Final Criticism:

Ahmed's version of Islam becomes arbitrary—based on personal practice, not reasoning or values.
"We drink wine" becomes Islamic just because some Muslims say it is, not because of a deeper meaning.
This makes "Islam" mean anything and nothing at the same time.

Talal Asad's Discursive Tradition

In his famous 1986 article "The idea of an anthropology of Islam" Talal Asad says that Islam is not just a social system or a collection of beliefs and morals.

He says Islam should be understood as a tradition specifically a 'discursive tradition' this means Islam is made up of ongoing conversations and arguments about how to live correctly as a Muslim based on its history, present situation and a future direction.

But this idea leads to some confusion, that the term he used is the discursive tradition. So if a tradition is made of discourses or conversations then calling it a discursive tradition, it sounds repetitive like saying a talking conversation.

And Asad's use of 'discourse' follows philosopher Michel Foucault's idea, that discourse means How power shapes knowledge and controls peoples beliefs.So when Asad talks about Islamic tradition he is talking about How power creates and guides Islamic ideas.

And Asad says Islamic orthodoxy is not just about certain doctrines but about how power works to enforce those doctrines.

Even though Asad agrees that Islam contains thoughtful arguments and reasoning, he still sees those as part of a power struggle.

Then Asad and other scholar Shahab Ahmed both criticize the idea that "Islam is whatever Muslims do"
They point out that Muslims often disagree with each other about what is considered Islamic.

Anti-essentialism

Kevin Reinhart, he argues that Islam doesn't really exist as a real thing.
(Essentialism: a belief that things have a set of characteristics which make them what they are)
It's just a name for the different things Muslims happen to do.
He thinks it's wrong to assume there is a single true Islam behind all Muslim practices.

For him Islam is just what Muslims imagine it to be.
If someone feels like a Muslim, aur Aadarsh feels that person belongs to the group, that's enough. There is no need for shared belief or practices.

He admits that Muslims believe the term "Islam" means "something" but he doesn't agree with that.
Even when Reinhart talks about Shared beliefs like belief in the Quran, he says those beliefs don't mean Muslims are United, because people understand the Quran differently.

But just because the Quran is interpreted in different ways doesn't mean it can mean anything at all.
Some verses have many interpretations, others only a few and some just one, so it doesn't mean it is anything at all.

Shortly, Dagli criticised Asad's perspective for reducing religious orthodoxy to mere power relations, neglecting the role of rationality and coherent belief systems in Islamic tradition.

On Reinhart's perspective, Dagli contends that his view effectively denies the existence of Islam as a distinct religion, reducing it to a social construct without substantive content.

The venture of Islam

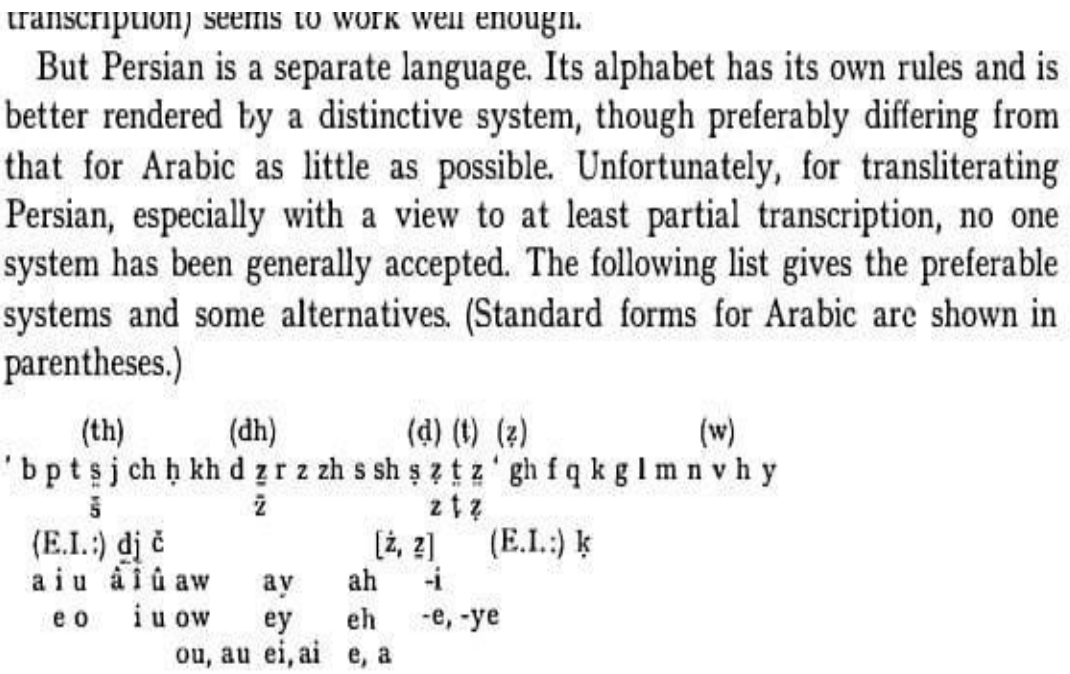
Hodgson,marshal GS

Islamicate civilization

," a term coined by historian Marshall G. S. Hodgson, refers to the broader social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and Muslims. It encompasses aspects of culture, art, literature, and society that have been influenced by Islam, even if they are not directly religious in nature or are found among non-Muslims within Muslim-influenced regions. This distinguishes it from "Islamic," which Hodgson reserved for elements pertaining directly to the religion of Islam itself

A significant portion of the introduction focuses on the importance of accurate transliteration from Islamicate languages, particularly Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu. The author argues that transliteration should be exact enough to reconstruct the original written symbols and, ideally, allow for recognizable pronunciation. He discusses the necessity of diacritics to distinguish between similar-sounding letters and names (e.g., "Hassan" vs. "Hasan") and explains that these marks are essential parts of new letters, not optional additions. The text also provides general suggestions for pronouncing transliterated Arabic and Persian words, including vowel and consonant sounds, long vowels, and the pronunciation of certain Arabic letters that may be difficult for Anglophones. It advises against dropping parts of compound Muslim names, as this can lead to confusion.

Transliteration is the process of converting text from one writing system (like Arabic script) into another (like the Latin alphabet) in a way that allows for the reconstruction of the original written symbols and, ideally, facilitates recognizable pronunciation. The author emphasizes the importance of using precise methods, including diacritics, to accurately represent the original letters and sounds, distinguishing it from simply trying to capture the pronunciation (which is called transcription). The goal is to make the foreign terms accessible and understandable to readers unfamiliar with the original script, without losing the specificities of the source language



transcription) seems to work well enough.

But Persian is a separate language. Its alphabet has its own rules and is better rendered by a distinctive system, though preferably differing from that for Arabic as little as possible. Unfortunately, for transliterating Persian, especially with a view to at least partial transcription, no one system has been generally accepted. The following list gives the preferable systems and some alternatives. (Standard forms for Arabic are shown in parentheses.)

(th) (dh) (ḍ) (ṭ) (ẓ) (w)
' b p t s̲ j ch ḥ kh d z̲ r z zh s sh ṣ ẓ ṭ z̲ ' gh f q k g l m n v h y
s̄ z̄ z ṭ ẓ
(E.I.:) d̲j č [ż, z̲] (E.I.:) ḳ
a i u â î û aw ay ah -i
e o i u ow ey eh -e, -ye
ou, au ei, ai e, a

Transliteration from Arabic

English	*International*	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*	*Approximate 'Literary' Pronunciation*	*Alternatives Sometimes Used*
'			glottal stop; as between the two words in 'me?! angry?'	often omitted
b			English b	
t			like English t	
th	t̲	th̲	English th in *thin*	t; ts
j	ǧ	dj	English j	g (in Egypt)
ḥ			pharyngeal h ('guttural')	h
kh	ḫ	kh̲	German and Scots ch, Spanish j (nearer h than k)	x; k̲
d			like English d	
dh	d̲	dh̲	English th in *this*	d; ds
r			rolled (trilled) r	
z			English z	s
s			hissed s (in *this*)	ss
sh	š	sh̲	English sh	sch; ch
ṣ			velar s ('emphatic')	ss; s
ḍ			velar d ('emphatic')	dh; d
ṭ			velar t ('emphatic')	th; t
ẓ			velar z ('emphatic')	z
'			glottal scrape; to Anglophones difficult to pronounce; sometimes omitted	

English	*International*	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*	*Approximate 'Literary' Pronunciation*	*Alternatives Sometimes Used*
gh	ġ	gh̲	voiced equivalent of kh above	g
f			English f	ph
q		ḳ	uvular k ('guttural')	c; k
k			English k	
l			English l (in *live*)	
m			English m	
n			English n	
h			English h	
w			English w	
y			English y (as consonant)	
a			short a as in *cat* or *ask* (according to position)	e
i			short i as in *bit*	e
u			short u as in *full*	o
â			long a as in *father*; sometimes as in *fat* (but held long)	au, o
î			long i as in *machine* (but held long)	ee
û			long u as in *rule* (but held long)	oo, ou
aw	au		English ow in *how*	ow, ou
ay	ai		English ai in *aisle* (or in *ail*)	ey, ei

The transliteration in the table marked 'English' is that usually used in English-language scholarly publications.[5] In this system some digraphs ar

[5] The 'English' system is close to that of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* except that it uses j as simpler than dj, and q rather than ḳ because the latter is more expensive and

This table provides a guide for transliterating Arabic letters into the Latin alphabet, useful in English-language texts that discuss Arabic words (e.g., in Islamic studies). Here's a breakdown of the columns and content:

Columns Explained:

1. **English (National):** The transliteration system commonly used in English-language scholarly publications.
2. **International:**Represents international academic transliteration standards.
3. **Encyclopaedia of Islam:** The system used by this major reference work.
4. **Approximate 'Literary' Pronunciation:** Gives an idea of how the Arabic letter is pronounced in English terms.
5. **Alternatives Sometimes Used:** Other transliterations or pronunciations you might encounter

Examples:

- Letter: ج
    - English: j
    - International: ǧ
    - EI (Encyclopaedia of Islam): dj
    - Pronounced: like English *j*
    - Alternative: *g* (in Egyptian Arabic)
- Letter: ق
    - English: q
    - International: ḳ

    - EI: ḳ
    - Pronounced: uvular *k* sound, deeper than English *k*
    - Alternative: c, k
- Letter: ځ
    - English: kh
    - International: ḫ
    - EI: kh
    - Pronounced: like the German or Scottish *ch* (as in "Bach")
    - Alternative: x, k̲
- Vowels:
    - a: like *a* in *cat*
    - i: like *i* in *bit*
    - u: like *u* in *full*
    - â (or ā): long *a* like in *father*
    - î (or ī): long *i* like in *machine*
    - û (or ū): long *u* like in *rule*
    - aw / au: like *ow* in *how*
    - ay / ai: like *ai* in *aisle*

1. Terminology is not optional — it is foundational.

Scholarship begins with words. If your vocabulary is vague, your ideas will collapse. Too many historians rely on terms like “Islamic feudalism”, “Persia”, or “the Orient” without realizing these are modern, politicized, and often Western-invented categories. These words carry heavy cultural baggage and false assumptions.

Lesson: Never trust inherited vocabulary without examining its implications. You must define your terms with precision and reject common usage if it leads to confusion. If you can't define it, don't use it.

2. Arabism is not Islam — reject Arab-centric distortions.

Islam did not come solely from a few Arabian families. The civilization we call Islamicate grew from a long-standing Irano-Semitic cultural matrix—from the Sumerians to the Sasanians. Muhammad's vision was rooted in, and responded to, broader regional conditions that already existed. The Islamic empire succeeded because it made sense in these contexts.

Lesson: Don't reduce Islam to the Arabs. Islamicate culture thrived because it merged into pre-existing frameworks across a vast, multilingual, multiethnic region. Stop treating Arabs as the default or only actors.

3. Philology alone is not history — it is a trap.

Many scholars fall into the trap of treating language and texts as absolute evidence. But texts are edited, corrupted, or reinterpreted—especially in Islamic and Sasanian contexts where direct sources are rare or unreliable. Writers like Zaehner and Altheim built entire historical theories on fragmentary or speculative translations. This is reckless.

Lesson: Don't confuse verbal patterns with social realities. Linguistic precision without historical grounding leads to fantasy. Always connect texts to lived human conditions

4. Periodization and maps are not neutral — they are Western constructs.

Terms like “Ancient,” “Medieval,” “Modern”, or maps that divide the world into “Europe, Asia, Africa” are not natural or objective. They were invented to place Europe at the center and frame its history as the universal model. This makes Europe appear like the “mainstream” of world history, which is both false and harmful.

Lesson: Reconstruct history with better tools. Use terms like “post-Axial,” “Islamicate,” or “Irano-Mediterranean” instead of relying on Eurocentric categories. Don’t let a 19th-century French map decide your historical framework.

5. Modernity is not the West — stop equating the two.

The “Technical Age” began after the Industrial and French Revolutions, but modern techniques—rationalization, technicalization—can appear anywhere. Using “modern” to mean “Western” is wrong and lazy. Similarly, calling everything pre-industrial “traditional” erases real distinctions within societies, like between Islamic law and local custom.

Lesson: Modernization and Westernization are not the same. Be cautious with generalizations. Be specific about what kind of development you’re describing—economic, legal, cultural—and where it comes from.

On Defining Civilizations

A civilization is not just a group of people with the same language or customs. It's more about shared traditions, especially in cities, like

art, religion, law, and literature. But defining a civilization is tricky because cultures have always mixed and borrowed from each other.

Key Points:

Language isn't enough: Just using the same language (like Arabic or Greek) doesn't mean it's one civilization.
Example: Arabic culture is often seen as Islamic, but many important ideas came from Syriac or Iranian cultures. These shouldn't be called "foreign."
Toynbee's idea: He split Islamic civilization into three, which may be wrong, but he reminds us we need good reasons to group cultures.

Main idea: Civilizations should be studied based on shared high-level traditions and how they grow and connect over time—not just language or location.

On Determinacy in Traditions" by Talal Asad

Main Idea:

Traditions don't control people like fixed rules. They only matter when they match real-life needs and interests. People in every generation make decisions based on what is useful to them now, even if those decisions are influenced by the past.

Key Points in Simple Words:

1. Tradition is not a fixed force.
Traditions don't have power on their own. They only influence people when those traditions make sense in their current situation.
Example: A belief or custom from the past won't survive unless it's useful today.
2. People are not prisoners of the past.

Each generation makes its own choices, even if they are affected by past traditions.
Example: Just because a culture respected farming in the past doesn't mean today's youth will choose farming over modern jobs.
3. Mistaken views about tradition and progress.
Some scholars wrongly say the West became modern because of its special values, while others failed because they were "stuck in tradition."
Example: Some say China didn't industrialize because of family values—but if China had industrialized first, those same values might be called "innovative."
4. Traditions change over time.
Even powerful traditions don't stay the same forever. When conditions change, people change too
5. All societies were active before modern times.
The idea that "the East" was asleep for centuries is false.
Example: Muslims were not blindly following the past—they were adapting their traditions to their needs at the time.

The History and Biases in Islamic Studies

Islamic Studies as a field has been shaped more by scholars' backgrounds and political influences than by any consistent understanding of "Islam" itself. Western scholars, in particular, dominated this field until recently and approached Islam through three main historical paths:

1. Ottoman Studies (Istanbul) – Focused on Islam as seen from Ottoman politics.

2. Indian Studies (Delhi) – British scholars studying Persian in colonial India saw Delhi as central to Islam's history.

3. Semitic Studies (Cairo) – Scholars interested in Hebrew moved to Arabic, often viewing Islam through Egyptian and Syrian Sunni lenses.

Other regions like Iran and the Fertile Crescent, especially with Shi'a influence, were often ignored because they were harder for Western scholars to access.

Problems in Early Western Islamic Studies:
Philological Bias: Scholars focused too much on language (mainly Arabic) and less on actual social and cultural realities. For instance, they studied the word "Shariʿah" more than its real-life function.

Arab-Centric View: Early scholars equated Islamic culture with Arabic culture, treating non-Arab elements like Persian or Greek traditions as "foreign," even though most Muslims had non-Arab backgrounds.

Limited Comparisons: Many studies compared pre-Islamic Arabia with Islamic Syria or Iran, but not Syria/Iran before and after Islam. This led to misleading conclusions about what Islam itself changed.
Consequences of This Bias:

Over-focus on "high culture" (religion, literature, politics) and neglect of daily life and local social structures.
Islamic civilization was wrongly seen as created by Arabs, while in reality it grew from older Irano-Semitic traditions (like those of Sumerians and Persians).

I. Historical Inquiry in Islamic Civilization:

* Focus on Islamdom as a unique and vital human endeavor, not just its modern impact.

* Historical judgment is tied to researcher precommitments; embrace insights but avoid bias.
* Conscious understanding of precommitments is key.

II. Scholar's Commitments:

* Scholars' personal commitments (e.g., Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Marxist, "Westernist") shape their work.
* No single allegiance guarantees impartiality; unconscious biases are common.
* Early Islamicists' work was deeply influenced by their foundational commitments.

III. Comparing Islam and Christianity:

* Avoid viewing one tradition as a "truncated" version of the other.
* Be skeptical of "Christianity manqué" or vice-versa arguments.
* Syncretism or reducing traditions to a "lowest common denominator" distorts them.
* Recognize the fundamental, often incompatible, demands of each tradition.

IV. Defining Civilizations:

* "Civilization" is a primary unit of study, partly data-driven, partly purpose-driven.
* Pre-Modern Eastern Hemisphere societies were interconnected, making single dividing lines difficult.
* Philological definitions (based on language) can be simplistic and lead to errors.
* A civilization is a complex of interdependent traditions, defined by its cultural continuity.

V. Determinacy in Traditions and Historical Change:

* Traditions are limited by their current relevance; they must be continually reinforced.
* Avoid explaining Modernity through inherent "seminal traits" or the "dead hand of tradition."
* Every generation makes its own decisions, though it reckons with past consequences.
* Differences between traditions are in the weighting and structuring of elements, not just their presence.
* Historical change is continuous; traditions are open and in motion.
* The "millennial torpor" view of the East is a misimpression rooted in ignorance and Western bias.

VI. The History of Islamic Studies:

* The field's definition has been arbitrary, shaped by political and external factors.
* Understanding the history of Islamics studies is crucial to interpret current works and avoid errors.
* Western scholarship entered through studies of the Ottoman Empire, India (Persian), and Semitists (Arabic).

1. Critique of Western-Centric Historical Narratives

- The traditional Western view of the Roman Empire's "fall" in 476 CE is challenged as overly focused on marginal western provinces like Gaul and Britain, ignoring the continuity of the empire in its eastern half. Referring to the later empire as the "East Roman Empire" obscures its unity and distorts the historical context of early Islamic interactions with the Mediterranean world.

- Western map projections, such as the Mercator, exaggerate Europe's size and centrality, marginalizing other cultural centers like

India. This ethnocentric bias, termed "JimCrow" world maps, persists in modern scholarship and distorts perceptions of Islamic civilization.

2. Terminology in Islamic Studies

The document proposes distinct terms to clarify the study of Islam: Islamdom: Refers to the society where Muslims and their faith are socially dominant, analogous to "Christendom." It includes non-Muslims and is not merely territorial but a complex of social relations.

Islamicate: Describes the cultural traditions associated with Islamdom, shared by Muslims and non-Muslims, distinct from the religion of Islam itself (e.g., secular arts, literature, or philosophy).

Islamic: Reserved for the religious aspects of Islam, such as Shari'ah law or religious literature, to avoid conflating religion with broader cultural phenomena.

These distinctions aim to prevent confusion, as terms like "Islamic" are often misused to describe both religious and cultural elements, leading to scholarly errors.

3. Geographical Terminology:

- The term "Middle East" is critiqued for its vagueness and military origins, which split the Iranian highlands and skew focus toward the Mediterranean. Instead, "Nile to Oxus" is proposed as a more precise and inclusive term for the region central to Irano-Semitic and Islamicate history, countering Western ethnocentrism.

"Irano-Semitic" refers to cultural traditions rather than a strictly geographical area, acknowledging their historical expansion.

4. Specific Terms and Their Misuse:

Arab: The term has multiple meanings, ranging from Bedouin nomads to speakers of Arabic-derived dialects or those using classical Arabic as a literary language. Misapplying "Arab" to all Muslims or Islamicate culture (e.g., including Persian or Indian achievements) is confusing and inaccurate.

Allâh: Using "Allâh" instead of "God" in English can imply Muslims worship a different deity, reinforcing a dogmatic bias. The term is appropriate only in specific philological or historical contexts.

Hadith: Translating hadith as "tradition" is misleading, as it suggests vague custom rather than specific, documented reports. The term "hadith report" is preferred to distinguish it from *sunnah* (custom) and avoid conflating textualism with traditionalism.

Sect (firqah): The Arabic term firqah is often mistranslated as "sect," implying distinct religious groups, when it usually means a "school of thought" on specific doctrinal points. This mistranslation creates misconceptions about Islamic diversity .

5. Translation in Scholarship:

Three types of translation are outlined: re-creative (artistic, impressionistic), explanatory (interpretive with commentary), and precise study translations (maximally accurate for scholarly use). Precise translations are critical for Islamic studies but are underrepresented due to a preference for creative or explanatory approaches .

Precise translations must retain ambiguities and avoid overly literal renderings to ensure fidelity to the original text's meaning.

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precise study translations (maximally accurate for scholarly use). Precise translations are critical for Islamic studies but are underrepresented due to a preference for creative or explanatory approaches .

Precise translations must retain ambiguities and avoid overly literal renderings to ensure fidelity to the original text's meaning.

The Essence of Islamic Civilization

ISMAIL RAJI AL FARUQI

1. Tawḥīd as the Core of Civilization

• Tawḥīd (Oneness of God) is the central principle of Islamic thought and civilization.
• It affirms Allah as the one, absolute, transcendent Creator.
• All other principles of Islamic culture stem from tawḥīd.
• It unites diverse cultural and historical elements into a coherent, organic civilization.

2. Tawḥīd as a Worldview

• Beyond theology, tawḥīd is a comprehensive worldview encompassing:
o Reality, truth, time, space, and history.
• It determines how Muslims understand and live in the world.
• Expressed in the kalimah: "Lā ilāha illa Allāh" — a simple yet profound statement embodying the entire Islamic worldview.

3. Core Principles of the Islamic Worldview

A. Duality

• Reality is divided into two distinct realms:
o God (Creator): Unique, eternal, and incomparable.
o Non-God (Creation): Includes all beings (humans, angels, jinn, etc.).
• These realms are ontologically separate — one cannot become or merge with the other.
B. Ideationality

• The relationship between God and man is cognitive and moral.
• Humans have faculties (reason, memory, intuition, etc.) to comprehend divine will:
o Through direct revelation or observation of creation.
C. Teleology

• The universe has a purposeful design; it is not random.
• Every element in creation fulfills a divinely intended role.
• Humans are the only beings with free will—their moral choices are not predetermined.
• Spiritual faculties (like moral judgment) lie outside natural necessity and require volition.

4. Capacity of Man and Malleability of Nature

• For divine purpose to be realized:
o Creation must be changeable, adaptable, and responsive.
o Man must be capable of transformation, both internally and externally (society and environment).
• Man is both:
o Subject: Agent of moral action.
o Object: One affected by divine will and nature.
• Moral freedom gives humans dignity, as they can choose to fulfill or violate divine commandments.

5. Responsibility and Judgment

• Moral freedom brings responsibility.
• Man must align himself and his world with the divine pattern (ought-to-be).
• Judgment (in this life or the next) is inevitable and necessary for moral accountability.
• Obedience to God leads to:

o Success (falāḥ), happiness, and ease.
• Disobedience results in:
o Punishment, suffering, and failure.

6. Historical Note: Abrahamic Lineages

• The Makkan Arabs and the Hebrews descend from Abraham (Ibrahim):
Ishmael settled in Makkah, founding the Quraysh tribe.
o Isaac's descendants faced cycles of migration, settlement, and dispersal.
• This shared ancestry underscores the interconnectedness of Abrahamic traditions.

Conclusion

Islamic civilization is rooted in the unity and transcendence of God. Tawḥīd is not only a belief but a lens through which Muslims perceive and interact with the world — shaping their understanding of knowledge, purpose, morality, responsibility, and destiny. The unique role of humans, their freedom, and accountability give Islamic civilization its moral structure and spiritual significance.

1. Tolerance as Methodological Principle

Epistemological Dimension (Sa'ah):
Tolerance is the willingness to accept current beliefs or knowledge until proven false. This methodological openness is essential for scientific inquiry and intellectual humility.

Ethical Dimension (Yusr):
Tolerance also applies to moral life — accepting what is desired until it proves harmful or unethical. This allows Muslims to engage with the

world optimistically and positively, rather than with suspicion or withdrawal.

Together, saʿah and yusr encourage openness to experience and critical reflection, preventing the closure of the mind and deadening conservatism.

2. Tolerance and Religion

Tolerance is tied to a universalist Islamic theology, in which:

God has sent messengers to all peoples, emphasizing a shared, primordial religion (al-dīn al-ḥanīf).

Religious diversity arises from historical and social conditions — not divine will for separation.

Therefore, Muslims are urged to study other religions constructively to identify this original divine message.

This reorients interfaith relations from confrontation to scholarly cooperation, aimed at peeling away historical distortions and recovering shared divine truth.

3. Tawḥīd as First Principle

a. Tawḥīd and Metaphysics:

To witness God's unity is to affirm a singular cause and purpose behind all phenomena.

Natural laws are seen as expressions of divine will, making science a religious endeavor.

This secularizes nature (frees it from superstition and myth) and lays the foundation for scientific progress.

Tawḥīd thus rejects all magical, mythic, or theurgical views of nature. Causality becomes sacred — and scientific exploration becomes a form of devotion.

b. Tawḥīd and Ethics:
Man is God's vicegerent (khalīfah), entrusted with moral responsibility in freedom.

This defines humanity's unique role in the cosmos — unlike animals or angels, only humans bear ethical responsibility.

This view elevates man without deifying or degrading him, unlike Greek, Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist views:

Greek: Deified man and his vices.

Christianity: Absolutized sin (original sin).

Hinduism: Locked people into castes.

Buddhism: Viewed life as suffering to be escaped.

Islamic humanism, based on tawḥīd, respects man as a noble moral agent, endowed with potential to rise, responsible to transform the world.

c. Tawḥīd and Axiology (Value Theory):
Tawḥīd affirms the world as good, purposeful, and created for human benefit.
Man is charged with prospering the earth, satisfying needs, and helping others do the same.
Civilization is built by this world-affirmation, disciplined by divine moral law.

However:

Without a higher moral principle, world-affirmation can lead to imbalance and ruin (e.g., Greek naturalism, modern Western secularism).

Only tawḥīd provides the moral compass to guide human development in a harmonious, sustainable way.

Conclusion: Tawḥīd as the Foundation of Civilization
Tawḥīd is not only a theological claim — it is:

A methodological guide for knowing truth (science, critical inquiry),
A moral framework for human dignity and responsibility,
A value system that affirms the world without idolizing it,
And a civilizational engine rooted in ethics and human agency.

This unified principle offers a holistic vision of life — one that supports progress, balance, and moral clarity without the extremes found in other systems.

Here's a detailed explanation of the relationship between Tawḥīd and Society and Tawḥīd and Aesthetics based on The Essence of Islamic Civilization by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, one of the most influential voices in modern Islamic thought.

🌟 1. Tawḥīd and Society (التوحيد والمجتمع)

Tawḥīd (Oneness of God) is the central concept of Islam — and for al-Faruqi, it is not just a theological idea but the foundation of the entire Islamic worldview. When applied to society, it transforms how humans live together.

According to The Essence of Islamic Civilization:

Al-Faruqi argues that Islamic civilization is a "tawḥīdic civilization", meaning every element of life — social, economic, political, legal — is shaped by the oneness of God. This leads to the following social consequences:

✅ Key Concepts:

1. Unity of the Human Family:

All human beings are created by one God and thus are equal in dignity and worth.
No race, tribe, or nation is superior — the only distinction is taqwā (piety).

2. Social Justice (ʿAdl):

Since God is Just, society must reflect justice.
Islam mandates fair treatment of the poor, orphans, women, minorities, and workers.
Zakat and Sadaqah are not charity — they are rights of the poor in society.

3. No Separation of Religion and Society:

Unlike Western secularism, Islam integrates religion into daily life.

Politics, economics, family law — all must be governed by divine guidance (Shari'ah).

4. Moral Accountability:

Every individual in society is responsible before God for his/her actions.

Leaders are not absolute rulers but servants of the people, answerable to God.

5. Consultation and Cooperation (Shūrā):

Decision-making in society must reflect mutual consultation.
Even political leadership is not autocracy, but grounded in ethical governance.

2. Tawḥīd and Aesthetics (التوحيد والجماليات)

For al-Faruqi, Islamic art and aesthetics are not neutral or decorative — they are deeply spiritual, shaped by the doctrine of Tawḥīd.

In The Essence of Islamic Civilization, he argues:

"The Muslim artist, starting from the premise that 'there is no god but God,' saw nothing in nature that may represent or express God. Yet all of nature is God's creation and hence, beautiful."

✅ Key Aesthetic Implications:

1. No Anthropomorphism:

Because God is unseen, eternal, and unique, Islam discourages visual depictions of God or prophets.
Hence, Islamic art avoids human or animal figures, focusing instead on abstract beauty.

2. Calligraphy as Sacred Art:

The Qur'an is the word of God, so writing it beautifully became a sacred act.
Arabic calligraphy developed into the highest form of visual expression.

3. Geometric and Floral Designs (Arabesque):

The endless patterns reflect the infinity and unity of God.
Repetition, symmetry, and order symbolize cosmic harmony under divine will.

4. Architecture Reflects Tawḥīd:

Mosques, domes, arches — all are designed to direct focus toward God.Light, space, and proportion in Islamic buildings evoke spiritual transcendence.

5. No Separation of the Sacred and Beautiful:

In Islamic tradition, beauty is not vain or superficial — it is a reflection of divine order.

Art and aesthetics are acts of devotion when inspired by the spirit of Tawḥīd.

📌conclusion

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, through The Essence of Islamic Civilization, shows that Tawḥīd is not just belief — it is a creative, ethical, and social force that:

Unifies all aspects of life,
Shapes just and compassionate societies,

Inspires beauty that reflects divine harmony without idolatry.

"Tawḥīd is the essence of civilization in Islam — the seed from which society, ethics, art, and knowledge all grow." – Al-Faruqi.

What Is Islam

Shahab Ahmed

Shahab Ahmed (1966–2015) was a Pakistani-born scholar of Islamic intellectual history who taught at Harvard University and Princeton. Born in Singapore on December 11, 1966, he grew up in Malaysia and the UK, gained a law degree from International Islamic University, Malaysia, and an MA in Arabic Studies from the American University in Cairo, before earning a PhD from Princeton University in 1999 .

A Harvard Society of Fellows Junior Fellow and later Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, Ahmed also held an appointment as Lecturer on Law and Research Fellow in Islamic Legal Studies at Harvard Law School. He taught for a year at International Islamic University in Islamabad (2007–08) before returning to Harvard. Fluent in numerous languages—including Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Malay, Turkish, and more—he explored themes across early Islam, medieval theology, Orthodoxy, and Qurʾānic interpretation .

His two major works include:

What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic (Posthumously published, 2015): An ambitious, encyclopedic analysis of Islam's "capaciousness, complexity, and … contradiction." It was hailed by Elias Muhanna as "strange and brilliant," tautly argued and politically urgent .

Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in the Thought of the Earliest Muslim Community (Based on his Princeton dissertation, published posthumously in 2017): A revisionist study suggesting that early

Muslims once believed in the Satanic Verses incident, a belief later repressed in orthodox tradition .

Ahmed was praised by his dissertation advisor Michael Cook as "a brilliant scholar with immense promise, tragically cut short," and by others—including Harvard Law professor Noah Feldman—as producing groundbreaking, field-changing scholarship. Sadly, he passed away at the age of 48 from leukemia on September 17, 2015 in Boston, shortly before his most celebrated work was published .

Quick Summary:

Detail Information

Born December 11, 1966, Singapore
Died September 17, 2015, Boston
Education Law (IIUM Malaysia), Arabic Studies (American University in Cairo), PhD (Princeton)
Academic Roles Harvard Society of Fellows; Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, Harvard; Lecturer in Islamic Legal Studies
Key Works What Is Islam? (2015), Before Orthodoxy (2017)
Legacy Revitalized the study of Islamic orthodoxy and diversity with erudition and intellectual boldness

Shahab Ahmed remains widely admired in Islamic studies for reshaping how scholars understand the formation and intellectual richness of Islam.

First chapter contains six questions

First question is about Islamic philosophy

Is Islamic philosophy part of islam ?

Answer. The Islamic philosophy is the part of islam because the Islamic philosophy will be needed for islam to preach it to others

Second Question: According to the Sufis, when someone becomes a "Friend of Allah" (Awliya Allah) through deep spiritual experience and unites with the ultimate reality (Al-Haqiqah), they claim that such a person no longer needs to follow Islamic laws (Shari'ah) and practices.
Is this claim Islamic or not?
Ans:Sufism, Philosophy, and Prophethood
Sufism sees itself as a deep development of the natural human ability to know (reason and inner knowledge). Sufis believe that by training all parts of a person — body, mind, and soul — one can directly experience the truth of God. For them, the Prophet Muhammad is the "Perfect Sufi" — someone who directly experienced the full reality of God.
In the Islamic world, Sufism became deeply rooted in society over centuries. It took shape through various Sufi tariqas (spiritual paths). These groups practiced intense devotion through prayer, remembrance of God (dhikr), and meditation. They expressed their experiences of God through poetry and language. Thinkers like Rumi, Ibn Arabi, and Al-Jili developed deep philosophical ideas from these experiences.
Sufis believe that God's truth has layers. The outer layer is the shariʿah (Islamic law), but the deeper inner truth is called al-haqiqah. While regular believers follow shariʿah, Sufis aim to directly experience al-haqiqah, the divine reality.
This led to big debates in Muslim society about who defines the truth. Some like Al-Hallaj were punished under shariʿah law, while

Sufis saw them as saints who sacrificed everything for God's truth.Sufis also claim that God reveals hidden truths (called kashf, bayan, ayyan) to certain chosen individuals. They believe this gives them a higher spiritual authority than traditional scholars of shari'ah. For example, Ibn Arabi said that legal scholars (fuqaha) are like Pharaohs when compared to those who truly know God.
So, if shari'ah is the path of obeying God's laws, Sufism is the path of directly experiencing God. Both aim for truth, but because of this direct connection, many people found Sufism more spiritually appealing.

Question 3

important ideas that greatly influenced Muslim history are Suhrawardi's Illumination philosophy and Ibn Arabi's unity of existence. Both combine Sufism and philosophy. They blur the lines between God's presence and transcendence, opening the way to ideas like pantheism. But are these ideas truly Islamic?

Answer:

In Suhrawardi's philosophy, all creation is part of God's divine light—God is present everywhere in some form. Ibn Arabi's idea is that everything reflects God, so God cannot be separated from creation. These ideas emphasize pantheism and mystical experience.

Ibn Arabi believed all forms of worship ultimately reach God.
Every form of worship contains a part of God.
So, even idol worship is worshipping God.
He saw that God wills things like the worship of the Golden Calf.

Ibn Arabi explained heaven and hell with spiritual meanings.

He said punishment ('adab') comes from sweetness ('udub'), so hell's pain is not purely physical.

He believed there is no absolute sin.
Disbelief and errors are relative to truth.
Because of this, some criticized him, while others accepted his views as spiritual insight.

Fear that Ibn Arabi's ideas might lead people away from Sharia led Sirhindi to bring Sufi experiences within Islamic law. His Mujaddidiyya-Naqshbandiyya movement became a key voice for law-focused Sufism in modern Islam.

The Fourth Question:

"When the most widely copied, widely circulated, widely read, widely memorized, widely recited, widely invoked, and widely proverbialized book of poetry in Islamic history—whose themes are wine-drinking, often homoerotic love, and a critical view of ritual piety—is accepted as canonical and even Islamic, then what does 'Islamic' really mean? Is such a work Islamic?"

Ahmed refers here to the Dīvān of Ḥāfiẓ of Shiraz, a Persian poet whose poetry profoundly shaped Muslim thought, identity, and expression across centuries.

What is the issue?

Ḥāfiẓ's poems are full of controversial themes: drinking wine (prohibited in Islam), ambiguous romantic love (sometimes between men), and criticism of strict religious observance.

Yet, these poems were loved, memorized, quoted, and respected by countless Muslims for 500 years. They were considered central to Islamic cultural life.

Why is this puzzling?

If these poems go against what many people think Islam teaches (e.g., no wine, proper rituals, etc.), then how can they be considered Islamic?

Ahmed is challenging us to rethink what we mean by "Islamic." Is it only legal and ritual obedience? Or can "Islamic" also include art, love, doubt, and beauty?

Ahmed's answer

The Dīvān of Ḥāfiẓ is deeply embedded in Muslim societies—especially in the "Balkans-to-Bengal" region—as a way of exploring self, God, and existence.

Muslims historically saw no contradiction in loving these poems and still calling themselves pious Muslims.

This shows that "Islamic" cannot be limited to law (sharīʿah) or formal rituals. It must also include the broader human experience of being Muslim—through poetry, emotion, imagination, and critique.

It helps us understand that Islam has been lived in many different ways—not just through rules, but also through creative, artistic, and spiritual expression.

Rather than seeing contradictions, we must recognize the plurality and richness of Islam as a lived reality.

THE FIFTH QUESTION ABOUT ART OF ISLAM FROM WHAT IS ISLAM OF TALAL AHMAD

1–10: Framing the Question

1. The fifth question in the book asks: “What is Islamic about Islamic art?” — challenging the assumption that art from Muslim societies is automatically "Islamic."

2. Shahab Ahmed critiques the reduction of Islamic art to a religious category, instead urging recognition of its cultural, historical, and intellectual complexity.

3. The term Islamic art is often used broadly to refer to art produced in Muslim societies, regardless of religious content.

4. He stresses that "Islamic" cannot be equated simply with "religious" or "orthodox" expressions.

5. Much Islamic art includes forms or themes (like wine, music, eroticism) that contradict legalistic or orthodox Islam.

6. The tension between Islamic law and Islamic aesthetics is central to understanding the diversity within Islamic expression.

7. Art is one of the domains through which Muslims have expressed complex relationships with beauty, meaning, and being.

8. The question reveals the limitations of defining Islam purely through legal or theological boundaries.

9. Ahmed highlights the inadequacy of existing scholarship that treats Islamic art as either decorative or religiously utilitarian.

10. He proposes that Islamic art must be analyzed in terms of hermeneutical engagement — how meaning is constructed and perceived.

11–20: Art Beyond Law and Doctrine

11. Many canonical works of Islamic art depict ideas or forms that are explicitly haram (forbidden) in Islamic law.

12. Persian miniature painting, for example, includes figural representation and wine-drinking scenes — yet flourished in deeply Islamic contexts.

13. Shahab Ahmed introduces the idea of pre-reflective being Muslim: ways of being that are Islamic but not consciously legalistic.

14. Art embodies the experiential dimension of Islam — how Muslims live and imagine Islam, not just how they think about it.

15. There's a historical continuity in the production of Islamic art that spans geographies, languages, and sectarian divides.

16. The aesthetic impulse in Muslim societies has often run parallel to, and even in tension with, theological orthodoxy.

17. Ahmed argues for a model of Islam that includes contradiction and multiplicity — which Islamic art often visually embodies.

18. Islamic art demonstrates Islam as a process of meaning-making, not a fixed set of rules.

19. The art of the Islamic world, including poetry, calligraphy, music, and architecture, represents embodied Islam.

20. Art becomes a site of interpretation, reflecting how Muslims interpret the Divine, beauty, and human experience.

21-30: Toward a New Understanding

21. Shahab Ahmed insists that Islamic art should be seen through the lens of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation — how people relate to the Qur'an, not just follow rules.

22. Calligraphy is one example of a form that is universally accepted, due to its connection to the Qur'an — but even this involves layers of aesthetic interpretation.

23. The Islamic-ness of art is not fixed, but a question of how it is experienced, used, and interpreted in context.

24. He critiques the Western scholarly tendency to impose rigid categories on Islamic art that don't reflect its lived realities.

25. The concept of adab (refinement, etiquette, literary culture) is deeply tied to artistic production in the Islamic world.

26. The tradition of Islamic poetry — especially Sufi — often celebrates the sensory and the earthly, in contrast to ascetic religious norms.

27. Rather than asking "is this allowed in Islam?", a more fruitful question is "how does this reflect a way of being Muslim?"

28. Art becomes a medium of paradox — where wine, forbidden in law, is used to symbolize divine love in poetry and painting.

29. The fifth question leads us to appreciate Islam as a complex human phenomenon, rather than a purely legal-theological one.

30. Ultimately, Shahab Ahmed's point is that Islamic art is Islamic not because it conforms to law, but because it is produced by Muslims seeking to express and interpret Islam through the arts.

The question is : **Is wine consumption islamic or not?**

Wine consumption is legally prohibited in islam. The quranic verse and the prophetic teachings are giving light into that.

But by researching on this topic we can find that wine was widely consumed and celebrated in islamic culture. We can find many writings that define and glorify the importance of wine.

Here are some examples from islamic history on wine consumption.

- Abu zayd al balkhi in his book masalihul abdan wal anfus says " wine is the best drink human have and the noblest drink in essence. " he notes that it gives pleasure from body to soul. The openness,animation, stimulations are given.it gives the noblest capacities like courage and magnanimity.

- Ibn Sina who is a well known scholar in medicine examines and explains the importance of wine and alcohol in the medical area.

- Nasiruddin tusi explains the manners and restrictions while drinking wine in his book 'aadabul sharab'.

- We know about the relationship between poems and wine. Many poets used wine in their works. Especially arabian and persian poems.

- Famous Persian poet Hafiz explains about the beauty and love for wine in his book ' diwane hafiz'.

- If we look into the Indian context,
- Mughal emperor babar writes in his autobiography " the gifts from safavid emperor abbas to jahangir was a selection of wine."And even jahangir had special wine jugs customised for wine drinking. The main jugs were white, green and grey as described by historians.

- Ottoman sultan Ibrahim was known as 'drunk' by the people for his wine drinking.
- And the muslim kings defeated Cyprus because it was rich in wine production.

- So, in nutshell, wine consumption is prohibited in legal discourses of islam. But it was widely used by muslims in a way that was attached to muslim culture and history. And shahab ahmed says that we cant say that wine is not islamic because it is legally prohibited. Islam is not a single oriented religion. We need to explore its cultural, political and historical aspects also.

Between Text and Practice: Considerations in the Anthropological Study of Islam

Ronald A. Lukens-Bull

📌 1. Introduction

Anthropologists face difficulty defining Islam: universal text or local practice?

The paper reviews trends in the anthropological study of Islam and suggests future directions.

The debate includes invented traditions and anthropological "inventions" of Islam.

📌 2. Orientalism and the Study of Islam

Talal Asad: Scholar's view of Islam is shaped by their "narrative relation" to it.

Bourdieu: Scholar's relationship to their subject leads to theoretical bias.

Edward Said: Orientalism reflects colonial power dynamics and distorts Islam.

Early scholars (Lane, Snouck Hurgronje) provided important ethnographies but were influenced by colonial and religious biases.

Latent Orientalism persists in modern scholarship.

Comparing Christianity to Islam shaped many Eurocentric anthropological frameworks.

Non-Muslim anthropologists face criticism of inherent bias, but insider views have their own limitations.

📌 3. Diversity of Tradition

➤ 3.1 Great and Little Traditions (Robert Redfield)

Great Tradition: Orthodox, elite, textual, urban religion.

Little Tradition: Popular, localized, everyday practice.

Interaction is two-way:

Universalization: Local practice becomes part of official doctrine.

Parochialization: Official religion is adapted locally.

➤ 3.2 Critiques

Critics: Redfield's model is too simplistic, assumes superiority of Great Tradition.

Talal Asad: Urges defining which Islam is "real."

El-Zein: Criticizes theological bias in anthropology; both traditions are equally "real" expressions of Islam.

Antoun: Model useful only if it avoids hierarchical judgments.

📌 4. Diversity and Discourse

➤ Talal Asad's 3 Approaches:

1. No single "Islam" exists.
2. Islam is whatever Muslims say it is.
3. Islam is a "discursive tradition": a living discourse grounded in foundational texts and ongoing interpretation.

➤ Discursive Tradition (Asad's Proposal):

Islam involves continuous dialogue about practice and belief.
It includes Qur'an and Hadith, but also local customs and concerns.
Not all practices by Muslims are "Islamic" by default—must be authorized by discourse.
Indigenous discourse plays a crucial role (e.g., Friday sermons, Islamic education).

The ulama, mystics, and common folk all contribute to the discourse. Emphasis on halal/haram questions central to Islamic discourse.

📌 5. Critique of the Discourse Approach

The discourse model isn't entirely new; it echoes earlier frameworks (e.g., Redfield).

Discourse = Social construction of shared meaning (textual and oral).

Power relations are key (e.g., elite vs. popular Islam).
Periods of political change heighten discursive activity (e.g., British India, Indonesia).

Islamic discourse includes:

Local traditions
Pre-Islamic great traditions (e.g., Hindu-Buddhist in Java)
Modern concerns (e.g., development, nationalism)

📌 6. Case Studies (Illustrations of Discourse in Practice)

Kelantan (1937): Dispute over dog purity reveals deeper struggle over Islamic authority.

Indonesia: New Muslim intellectuals with Western education redefine Islam's role.
North India: Elite Islamic practices became normative during British rule.

📌 7. Conclusion

Central question for anthropologists: What counts as Islam?

Must distinguish between theological and theoretical definitions.

Suggests starting with Islam as “submission to God”, then studying how different communities define and perform this.

Emphasizes the need for comparative ethnology to study diverse local Muslims.

Hayy ibn Yaqzan

IBN THUFAIL

Theme of the Book:

Self-Discovery and Human Reason
The central theme is the ability of the human mind to reach truth through reason and observation, without instruction. It promotes the idea that divine truths can be reached by pure reason, independent of society, religion, or tradition.

The book is about a boy named Hayy ibn Yaqzan, who grows up alone on a deserted island. Through observation of nature and deep thinking, he discovers everything — from the physical world to spiritual truths, and even the existence of God — without any human guidance.

Author: Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185 CE)
Andalusian Muslim polymath — physician, philosopher, and court official.he Wrote Hayy ibn Yaqzan as an allegorical novel to demonstrate how reason and intuition can lead a person to ultimate truth without religious instruction.

Main Characters:

1. Hayy ibn Yaqzan
The protagonist. Either born miraculously or sent to the island as a baby, he grows up alone and becomes a self-taught philosopher.

2.Absal
A devout man from a nearby island who seeks solitude and meets Hayy. He becomes Hayy's first human contact and introduces him to religion. But he is surprised that Hayy already knows many of the same truths.

3.Salaman
Absal's friend, a religious man, focused on rituals and social order. He represents people who need organized religion.

Major Themes and Ideas

1. Autonomous Human Reason
The mind, free from society or tradition, is capable of attaining metaphysical truths.
Human reason mirrors divine order; therefore, if left uncorrupted, it can intuit God, ethics, and the nature of existence.

2. Stages of Knowledge
Hayy's journey mirrors the epistemological ladder:

- Sensory perception (ḥiss)
- Empirical observation
- Rational deduction (ʿaql)
- Metaphysical contemplation
- Mystical union (fanāʾ)

Characters and Their Symbolic Roles:

Hayy
The human intellect; the self-taught seeker of truth.

Absal : The mystic or esoteric religious believer.

Salaman

The formalist, exoteric religious type; politician or cleric.

Context of Writing

Time and Place: 12th Century al-Andalus (Islamic Spain)

Location: Granada, in the court of the Almohad dynasty
Era: The Almohad Caliphate (a reformist Islamic movement) was in power, encouraging both religious orthodoxy and philosophical inquiry (especially under Caliph Abu Yaʿqub Yusuf, Ibn Tufayl's patron).

• Ibn Tufayl was the personal physician and chief intellectual in the Almohad court — he later introduced Ibn Rushd (Averroes) to the court.

Here is a clear and accurate English translation of the Arabic passage you provided, summarizing the essence of Imam Al-Ghazālī's book "Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl":

“Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl wa al-Mufṣih ʻan al-Aḥwāl”

IMAM GAZZALI

This book, titled “Deliverance from Error and Disclosure of Inner States”, is the summary of the spiritual and intellectual journey of the Muslim scholar Imam Al-Ghazālī. It encapsulates the essence of his search for truth, especially as it was written in the later years of his life, after he had spent decades in learning, teaching, and scholarly pursuit.

In the introduction, Imam Al-Ghazālī explains that the reason he wrote this book was due to a question posed to him. The questioner asked him to explain the purpose and secrets of the various sciences, the dangers and depths of the different religious sects, and to narrate what Al-Ghazālī endured in his quest to extract the truth from among the conflicting Islamic groups. He was also asked how he moved from blind imitation (taqlīd) to independent reasoning (ijtihād) and spiritual insight (baṣīrah), what he gained from theology (ʿilm al-kalām), what he disliked about the teachings of the Ismāʿīlī (Taʿlīmiyyah) sect, and what he rejected from philosophy, and what he ultimately embraced from the path of Sufism (taṣawwuf).

The questioner also asked him why he withdrew from his teaching position in Baghdad, despite having many students,

and why he returned to teaching in Nīshāpūr after a long period of seclusion.

Seeing the sincerity of the questioner, Imam Al-Ghazālī responded by writing this book to answer all those questions.

He began by describing the intellectual effort he exerted in refining his thoughts and ideas. From a young age until his fifties, he remained deeply engaged in various sciences, studying the views of every sect and exploring the depths of every school of thought, until he freed himself from blind imitation and attained true intellectual and spiritual insight.

He then spoke about the kind of knowledge that leads to true certainty (yaqīn) and should be relied upon. He shared how he adopted a method of doubt, which at one point led him to the brink of skepticism (sophistry) and the rejection of all knowledge. He remained in this state for about two months, until God guided him and healed him, and he once again accepted rational sciences as trustworthy.

He then classified seekers of truth into four main groups:

1. Theologians (Mutakallimūn)
2. Philosophers
3. Taʿlīmiyyah (Ismāʿīlīs / Esotericists)
4. Sufis

He went on to examine each of them:

He began with the theologians, then moved to the philosophers, explaining what in philosophy is blameworthy, what leads to disbelief, and what merely leads to heresy.

He highlighted how philosophers borrowed ideas from the people of truth, mixing them with falsehood to promote their doctrines.

He carefully showed how to extract pure truth from their mixed and deceptive speech.

He also described the six divisions of philosophy:

1. Mathematics
2. Logic
3. Natural sciences
4. Theology (metaphysics)
5. Politics
6. Ethics

He then discussed the Taʿlīmiyyah (Ismāʿīlīs) and their intellectual dangers, followed by an account of the Sufi path, explaining that their approach is grounded in both knowledge and action. The core of their discipline lies in purifying the soul and emptying the heart of everything but God, then adorning it with the remembrance of God (dhikr).

Al-Ghazālī also explained the reality of prophethood, and why all humanity is in need of prophets.He concluded the book by discussing why he returned to teaching after nearly ten years of isolation, explaining that he did so in order to refute the doubts of the misguided and revive religious knowledge.In the end, he reflected on the causes behind the weakening of faith

among people and how such weaknesses can be treated and cured.

Divān of Hafez

HAFIZ

The Divān of Hafez is a big book of poems written a long, long time ago by a man named
Hafez. He lived in a city called Shiraz, in the country of Iran.
This book is full of beautiful poems about love, life, God, sadness, hope, and mystery. Most
of the poems are in the Persian language, and some have words from Arabic too.
The most special kind of poem in the book is called a ghazal. A ghazal is a short poem that
sounds like a heart is talking. These poems are full of deep feelings and wise thoughts.

Why Did Hafez Write Poems?

Hafez didn't write poems just to be famous. He wrote because his heart was full — full of
love, questions, feelings, and dreams.
In his poems, it feels like he is talking to God, to someone he loves, to a friend, or even to
himself. Sometimes his poems are happy, sometimes sad, and sometimes a little silly or
funny. But they always make you feel something real.
People say Hafez didn't write a huge number of poems — around 495. That's still a lot! But it
shows he wanted his poems to be really good, not just a lot of them.

How Is the Book Structured?

The Divān has different types of poems, but the ghazals are the heart of it. Here's what's

inside:

- Ghazals – short, lyrical poems (most of the book)
- Qasidas – long poems, sometimes about praise
- Rubaʿis – four-line poems
- Mathnawis – couplet poems with stories

How Did We Get Hafez's Book

Hafez died before he could make his poem book himself. After he died, a man named
Mohammad Golandam took many of Hafez's poems and put them into a book. That was
probably the first version of the Divān of Hafez.
Later, people in Iran, India, Europe, and other places copied the book by hand. That's why we
now have about 1,700 handwritten copies!
Hafez's poems were also changed into many other languages, like English, Urdu, French,
German, Chinese, and Spanish. He is one of the most translated poets from Iran!

Why Is the Divān of Hafez So Special?

The Divān of Hafez is special because every poem feels magical. Even a small poem can
make your heart feel something big and important.
People of all kinds love his poems — rich or poor, young or old. Even kings and queens liked
them!
Today, people still use his poems at weddings, when they are happy, sad, or in love.
There's also a fun Persian tradition called Fāl-e Hafez. People open the book at random and
read a poem to get advice or help with a question.His poems are not just about love or God — they are about everything people feel in life.