

# A Brief History of the Modern World

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The modern world is characterised by nation-states, international institutions, both global and regional, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), and international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank and Asian Bank. Some other notable features of the modern world are the international banking system, multi-national corporations (MNCs), modern education with English as the primary language, information and communication modes and systems, industry, and technology with its myriad aspects ranging from medicine to nuclear technology.

Similarly, there are also certain dominant values in the modern world, such as the concept of freedom, democracy, human rights, individualism and the primacy of the self<sup>1</sup>. This spectre remains in a constant state of flux and mutates to discard some values or at least parts of them and include new ideas such as, more recently, in the realm of gender and LGBT rights.

There are also some apparent problems, both peculiar and somewhat endemic to the modern world. Some of these problems may be enumerated as colonialism, civil wars in post-colonial states, exploitation of erstwhile colonies and present-day independent states, skewed power structures favouring a few countries such as the United States (US), economic disparity, and more recently, environmental problems.

As conscientious Muslims who inhabit this world and engage with it, we must seek to make this world a better place if it is not how it ought to be.

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<sup>1</sup> Turner, Bryan S. "Individualism, capitalism and the dominant culture: A note on the debate." *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1988): 47-64.

Conversely, if it is already the desired utopia, we must attempt to expand its borders and adopt it more fervently. In either case, we need first to understand this world. We need to know how it came to be, how it functions, who governs or at least holds sway in it, and how it shapes us as individuals and societies.

Studying social phenomena, not unlike getting to know an individual, requires a sense of history. The first step to understand the modern world should, therefore, be its historicism. We shall cover about a thousand years of history of mostly the Western societies due to their seminal role in shaping up the present world. There shall be occasional references to Eastern and Muslim societies as well, but primarily for comparison.

A millennium ago, the civilised West was what we refer to as Southern Europe today – France and southwards. This area was the centre of European cultural and political activity and was relatively advanced. This area comprised the Western Roman Empire and the Kingdoms of France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. On the contrary, Northern Europe, comprising present-day Germany, Britain, and Scandinavia, lay on the cusp of barbarism and civilisation<sup>2</sup>. Despite being relatively advanced and civilised, Southern Europe was not as important an area as the Muslim lands. The West Asian region of present-day Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt was the intellectually and scientifically most advanced part of the world<sup>3</sup>.

Around the turn of the last millennium, Southern European polities, despite being in contact with the Muslim world (for trade, for example), decided to attack parts of the Muslim lands. These attacks came to be known as the Crusades in history and continued for a good part of two centuries. The attackers could not get deep into the Muslim heartland because they did not

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<sup>2</sup> Childe, V. Gordon. *The Dawn of European civilization*. Routledge, 2013

<sup>3</sup> Wasserstein, Bernard. *Barbarism and civilization: a history of Europe in our time*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

have the necessary power nor technology. Their main area of activity was the Eastern Mediterranean coast, comprising some coastal areas of present-day Syria, Lebanon and Turkey. They were victorious in some battles and suffered defeat in some, but they did manage to create small temporary outposts in these areas that eventually collapsed when Muslims fought and pushed them back to Europe<sup>4</sup>.

The Crusades, nonetheless, had several lasting consequences on both Muslim and European societies. The one consequence of our concern here is Europeans' increased familiarity with Muslim technology, science, and civilisation. The Crusaders did not only fight the Muslims and pillage their lands but temporarily settled down in some area. In their interactions, especially with Muslims in Greece, the Europeans got acquainted with many scientific advancements exclusive to the Muslims. Many of them learnt Arabic and translated Arabic texts into European languages. This started a flow of knowledge and ideas from the Muslim societies to Southern Europe and engendered an intellectual and scientific movement<sup>5</sup>.

Coupled with the fact that erstwhile Spain was a crucial Muslim land inside Europe radiating knowledge and scientific advancement to the rest of Europe, the newfound intellectual stream through the Crusades resulted in a genuine sense of inferiority among the Europeans. The contrast they witnessed between the Eastern Mediterranean Muslims lands and Spain and the Christian lands was conspicuous. They saw Muslims as intellectually and scientifically advanced, and their societies and civilisation much superior to their own<sup>6</sup>.

A combination of these factors – the flow of new ideas and the sense of inferiority – contributed to the frustration developing in Southern Europe.

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<sup>4</sup> Runciman, Steven. *A History of the Crusades*. Vol. 3. CUP Archive, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Madden, Thomas F. *The concise history of the Crusades*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Linehan, Peter. *History and the historians of medieval Spain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

One cannot set a precise date for it, but the frustration eventually culminated in an event, or period in history, referred to as the Renaissance. One certainly cannot reduce the Renaissance to mere contact of Europeans with Muslims, as many internal and external factors resulted in this watershed moment. However, the importance of their increased exposure to and interactions with the Muslim world cannot be downplayed either<sup>7</sup>.

Renaissance saw contributions in a variety of new expressions and changes in art, culture, science, politics and religion. This transition from the Middle Ages to modernity was quite complex and cannot be credited to a few individuals, but some names, such as Galileo Galilei and Leonardo da Vinci, stand out for their influence.

Galileo is mainly famous for espousing Copernican heliocentrism<sup>8</sup>, while Da Vinci, though famous as a painter, has vast contributions in science and anatomical studies of the human body. However, much before da Vinci, Muslims conducted detailed anatomical works evident in Bu Ali Sina's al-Qānūn fī al-Tibb. The book was translated into Latin and taught in European universities as the canon for centuries. Few know that the English word canon is an anglicised version of the Arabic word al-Qānūn<sup>9</sup>.

The Renaissance also saw a renewed interest in Classical Greek history<sup>10</sup>. Today, it is common to see Western Civilisation being traced back to the Hellenic period, but the Europeans had no interest in pre-Christian Greek history until the Renaissance. When they did start taking an interest in Greek philosophy and history, they once again had to refer to the Muslims who had inherited the entire Greek intellectual corpus. The Europeans had

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<sup>7</sup> Meserve, Margaret. *Empires of Islam in Renaissance historical thought*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Leveillee, Nicholas P. "Copernicus, Galileo, and the church: Science in a religious world." *Inquiries Journal* 3, no. 05 (2011).

<sup>9</sup> Moon, Francis C. *The Machines of Leonardo Da Vinci and Franz Reuleaux: kinematics of machines from the Renaissance to the 20th Century*. Vol. 2. Springer Science & Business Media, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Woodward, Arthur Maurice. "Greek history at the Renaissance." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 63 (1943): 1-14.

severed ties with their history, and now they needed the help of Muslims to teach them their own history<sup>11</sup>.

The Renaissance also saw a shift in the manner in which people approached religion and God. Until then, the idea of a good life was interpreted in terms of what God wanted of men. However, during this period, we see people taking recourse to other sources to find answers to life. One may even discern the development of what later came to be known as humanism during this period. This thread ties together all ideas and activities in art, science, politics and society, and even the movement's personalities.

We do not see a rejection of religion or God during this period. However, there is undoubtedly a clear attempt to look elsewhere for answers<sup>12</sup>. The fledgeling humanist movement did not reject God; it simply stopped belabouring people trying to find out what God wanted in order to live their lives accordingly. Even modern humanist worldviews do not necessarily reject the idea of God but relegate it to the periphery of human concerns by emphasising human reason and experience as the source of knowledge. Although in some cases, later on, this approach has even culminated in the outright and emphatic rejection of God<sup>13 14</sup>. This is in stark contrast to how Islam envisages the relationship between Allah (saw) and humans.

While humanism considers humans its unit of reference and disconnects humanity from God<sup>15</sup>, Islam exalts humans as *ashraf ul-makhlūqāt*, the best of Allah's creations. Islam accords humans a central status but not independent of God, rather as His finest creation with almost unfettered potential. This difference between these opposing worldviews does not

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<sup>11</sup> Bridgman, Timothy P. *Hyperboreans: Myth and history in Celtic-Hellenic contacts*. Routledge, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Blum, Paul Richard. *Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance*. Routledge, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Kors, Alan Charles. "At the Origins of Modern Atheism." (1989): 614-617.

<sup>14</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. "God and philosophy." In *Collected philosophical papers*, pp. 153-173. Springer, Dordrecht, 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Grayling, A. C. (2013). *The God argument: The case against religion and for humanism*. A&C Black.

remain limited to the domain of ideas but informs all aspects of human life. Society, politics, law, industry, art, and other life schemes inevitably shape up in the concomitant images of the two worldviews.

Elsewhere at the same time, Muslims were reeling from and trying to recovering from the devastation of the Mongol invasion. During the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the Mongols descended from the steppes of Central Asia in the Muslim heartlands and wreaked havoc<sup>16</sup>. Iran and Iraq were plundered, entire cities were wiped out. They went as far as Egypt, massacring populations, burning cities, and eventually bring down a civilisation. Muslim kingdoms and civilisational outposts, unable to weather the marauders, collapsed. The only part of the Muslim world that partially survived this onslaught was in India.

The newly established Muslim rule in India managed to repel the Mongol invasion and later played a role in recovering and reviving Muslim heritage. Many intellectuals on the run sought refuge in India during this time. They contributed to the process of recovery before they, or their progeny, could return to Iran or Iraq at the end of the reign of terror. So, while Europe was experiencing the Renaissance, the Muslim lands were recuperating from the Mongol invasion.

One might also add here that there is even some evidence of collaboration between the Mongols and the erstwhile European rulers. Extant letters exchanged between the two sides back then wherein the latter can be seen exhorting the Mongols to attack the Muslim lands give credence to this view. The Europeans would also promise the Mongols of coordinating their own attacks with theirs to confront the Muslims more effectively. There is even some suspicion that despite being idolators themselves, the Mongol rulers did have some Christian courtiers who might have played a role in

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<sup>16</sup> Saunders, John Joseph. *The history of the Mongol conquests*. University of Pennsylvania press, 2001.

these attacks and the pogroms that followed. Some Mongols leaders even had Eastern European Christian wives who had been given in marriage to forge links, perhaps even as a policy.

Europe, concomitantly, was entering a period referred to as the Early Modern Period. Also called the Age of Discovery<sup>17</sup>, this was a period European adventurers backed by Southern European courts set sails to explore the world. Italian, Spanish and Portuguese sailors and adventurers travelled to what were for them uncharted parts of the world. Even the term Age of Discovery serves as a testament to the ignorance of medieval Europeans, for the world did exist even before they set out to find it, only they did not know about it. Nonetheless, it was during this period that Vasco de Gama came to India in 1498, for example, and Ferdinand Magellan led the expedition to circumnavigate the globe. Europeans made contact with the Americas, South Asia and East Asia through the ocean.

The Portuguese were soon followed by the British pirates in this business. The British, led most notably by the privateer Francis Drake, joined the fray later in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. They mostly served as extensions of their respective governments and shared their loots with the kings and princes as a return on their original investments. They masqueraded as traders when needed and used violence where the opposition was weak in order to make footholds and plunder their lands.

For about 150 years, these adventurers supported by the courts kept traversing through waters in Asia and troubling the local people. They resorted to violence, piracy and tried to hoist their flags wherever they went but were largely unsuccessful in the face of, for example, strong kingdoms in India. They did manage to capture small islands here and there, such as

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<sup>17</sup> Arnold, David. *The age of discovery, 1400-1600*. Psychology Press, 2002.

Goa in India, Malacca and Malaya in Southeast Asia, Muscat, Zanzibar and some areas in Tanzania and Kenya. This, not unlike any other, is a dark chapter in Western history.

While they could not conquer much land, these adventurers-cum-pirates infested the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and eventually the Indian Ocean. They controlled the sea routes and blocked trade routes used mainly by Muslims – Persians, Arabs, Indians and Malay. They had put in place a system of extortion in which if a trader wanted to use a particular route, or someone wanted to go on Hajj, for example, he would need to first go to Goa, even if it was in the opposite direction, and cough up so-called protection money to the Portuguese. In turn, the Portuguese would issue a receipt that would guarantee their safety from being looted by Portuguese ships on the route. However, if misfortune led them chance upon British ships on the way, they would be attacked and looted.

Extortion and piracy had become a source of wealth creation in erstwhile Europe. However, these crimes were not limited to piracy alone. There are some very unpleasant incidences of ships being plundered by these pirates, most notably the gut-wrenching incident of the *Gang-i-Sawāi*. *Ganj-i-Sawāi* was a colossal ship that sailed from Surat in Gujrat, India, carrying Muslims bound for Hajj, including some distant relatives of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. The ship was chased in the sea for several days and finally plundered by notorious British pirates, who not only looted the ship but also committed heinous crimes. They killed people at will and raped women on the ship for several days. Some women even jumped into the ocean to save their honour.

During this period, we also see the initial steps towards colonialism, mainly in South America. During the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, there was a large scale purge of the native populations in Southern and Central America. It would not be an



overstatement to say that millions of native American died or were killed during this period of colonisation, reducing their population to a fraction of their pre-colonisation numbers. In some places, such as Mexico, their population declined by 90%. They were killed in a war, subjected to a brutal communal slavery system called Encomienda, or died to infectious diseases with little or no access to medicine.

The exploitative colonisers, who had succeeded the native Inca and Aztec kingdoms, had found a bonanza in gold and silver deposits. They subjected the native populations to forced labour and looted the continent for centuries while simultaneously migrating in huge numbers and taking over the area eventually. While their primary motivation was financial, they also forced the local populations to embrace Christianity.

South America remained the only largescale Portuguese and Spanish colonial project. They looted the heartland, controlled the areas, and after having wiped out the native elite and knowledge systems, subjected the remaining weak populations to their ideas of faith and the world. Despite their escapades and loot both in the East and the West, the early modern period also witnessed the subsequent waning of the Portuguese and Spanish power. This decline was met with the rise of the British and French power and ambitions, who now sought to replace their ageing predecessors. While propagation of Christianity remained a secondary goal of the colonisers and the missionaries were usually well ensconced in their projects, one can also discern the growth and spread of preliminary humanist view during this period, albeit not as an outright rejection of God.

It would be pertinent to mention here that Muslims ruled Spain for 700 years until 1491 when the Nasrid dynasty was defeated by the forces of Isabella I and Ferdinand II. As a consequence, a large number of Muslims and Jews were expelled from Spain. Those who left behind were forced to embrace

Christianity. Such was the intolerance that Muslims were not allowed to close the front door to their houses on Fridays for generations. The rulers wanted to make sure the Muslims did not pray even privately and made them feel unsafe and under constant watch. Such steps, coupled with forced conversions and enslavement of the poorer sections of the population, resulted in the conversion of most of the remaining Muslim population to Christianity.

The colonial focus on South America during this period can perhaps be traced back to the relative strength of Muslim empires back then. The Europeans could not try their luck in the Muslim lands even if they wanted to. After the Mongol devastations, Muslims recovered remarkably and established three powerful and advanced empires in the East roughly between 1500 to 1750 AD: the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire, and the Mughal Empire. The Ottoman Empire extended far beyond its centre in Turkey to include Eastern and Central Europe; the Safavid Empire included present-day Iran, Central Asian Republics and parts of the present-day Arab emirates; the Mughal Empire at its peak covered almost all of India, Kashmir, present-day Pakistan, northern Afghanistan and Bangladesh. These huge Empires kept the interested Europeans at bay, who were forced to operate mainly as traders or pirates knowing well they were far inferior intellectually, technologically, financially and militarily. The Europeans hence turned their focus towards South America, where they would not face such formidable opposition.

In contrast to their approach in South America, the Europeans tried to maintain cordial terms with the Muslim empires. They would routinely send over their emissaries in attempts to get close to the emperors. For example, we know of Jesuit missionaries or Franciscan friars turning up in the Mughal Emperor Akbar's court to promote Christianity or at least get some

concessions for European traders who would arrive at the port cities of India but never made attempts to venture beyond.

For about 200 or 250 years since the beginning of the Age of Discovery, the Europeans had a presence in these three empires. They approached the emperors, engaged in trade, toured the lands but never made attempts to capture them or initiate conflict. They only studied these empires. It is interesting to know that during the rule of Emperor Aurangzeb (d. 1707), the Mughal Empire was the largest in the world. During Aurangzeb and his predecessor Jahangir's rule, we find instances of the rulers chastising European traders and placing sanctions on them. For example, when the Ganj-i-Sawāi incident took place, Aurangzeb banned the British from trading in Indian ports. The British protested and distanced themselves from the pirates. They took a plea of being victims of piracy themselves but were, nonetheless, banned from India. It took a few years of begging the rulers till they were allowed to trade in the main port of Surat. Similar, during Jahangir's rule, a British trader committed some excesses, including killings of people in Eastern Bengal. As a result, Jahangir ordered all the British out of India, who had to spend a couple of years begging the court to allow them to return.

While in the domain of politics, they had adopted a policy of befriending the powerful and destroying the weak, the Europeans were undoubtedly making progress in science, such as in the fields of optics, astronomy, navigational instruments and medicine. Simultaneously, the insidious idea of humanism was further developing and spreading into society on a broader scale.

Perhaps, one can even credit the scientific development during the Renaissance to the newfound humanistic approach to life. By turning away from God and investing their energies and thoughts into studying and dominating the physical world, the Europeans supplanted Muslims in the

field. The Muslims, fatalistic and complacent, had lost sight of their purpose of studying the material world as a means to understanding the creation and the Creator better.

Scientific advancement and faith are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they can complement each other. The Europeans adopted the approach of ignoring God and the afterlife and making the most of the material world and did, admittedly, well. For the earlier Muslims, the motive was to understand God's creation better in order to know Him better and worship Him as He ought to be worshipped. Both of these approaches can potentially lead to scientific and technological advancement. However, the Renaissance Europeans adopted the former and actually pushed themselves further both in the ideational domain of humanism and the concomitant pursuit of dominating matter.

From this period onwards, beginning in the mid-Eighteenth Century, we have a two hundred year period the West refers to as the Late Modern Age. This period builds on the early modern period, and its defining feature is colonialism, or more accurately, advanced colonialism that begins with India<sup>18</sup>.

In 1757, the British did something in India they had not done before. They made their first bold move, culminating in the Battle of Plassey, and captured the province of Bengal in Eastern India. For the first time, a European power became the ruler of a Muslim land<sup>19</sup>. The British ransacked the Bengal treasury, but unlike South America, where the colonisers were content with looting gold and silver, the British did something else that makes this phase an advanced form of colonialism. The British created a

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<sup>18</sup> Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of mind: Colonialism and the making of modern India*. Princeton University Press, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835*. Univ of California Press, 1969.

system of constant exploitation in which the entire wealth flow of their colonies was to be directed towards them. Now the colonisers collected the lands taxes, crop taxes, administered justice (as arbitrarily as it suited them), and ruled as the land as parasites. Bengal was the starting point of advanced colonialism in which they put in place policies that hollowed out the colonies and created endless streams of wealth flow to Europe.

Within a decade of the British takeover, there was a famine in Bengal caused by their exploitative policies put in place with blithe disregard for local people. We do not have detailed records, but the famine is estimated to have killed ten million people in ten years. The famine was caused by the British insistence on collecting their unfairly imposed taxes and tributes despite low rainfall resulting in the collapse of the food system. The famine caused the death and displacement of millions. It was the beginning of a regular pattern of famines across India caused by the British policies between 1757 and the 1940s. Successive famines during this period resulted in the Indian population stagnating or even declining during the period of colonisation. The view that the British policies resulted in these famines is widely documented and endorsed by recent scholarship.

This systematic exploitation of colonies resulted in an unprecedented flow of wealth to the colonisers but left the host societies continuously bleeding. For example, India was an agriculturally productive country, but as it suffered from successive famines, its agricultural produce would be exported to other countries such as China or even elsewhere. The farmers of India had to bear the burden of heavy taxation, but the eventual profits filled the coffers in the UK. The local industry was destroyed, while the British industry was developed, and manufactured goods were sent back to India after robbing it of raw materials at low prices.

This leads us to another feature of this period: industrialisation, beginning in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England. Industrialisation is defined as the use of large machinery and large-scale production and assembly line procedures to mass-produce goods<sup>20</sup>. In England's case, the wealth sucked out from India played a vital role in capital accumulation that – combined with simultaneous scientific advancement – led to the industrial revolution. The steam engine, a watershed moment in world history, was invented during this period. Similarly, the telegraph, a revolution in the field of communication, was invented by the British. The steam engine resulted in the invention of steam engine trains and large steam engine ships, speeding up industrialisation and making colonial outreach easier. The development of modern arms and armaments industry and bombs changed the nature of warfare. The roots of the international banking and finance system and the gold standard as the currency exchange method also go back to the same period—this 200 year period that shaped the world as we know it today.

The Late Modern Age saw the rise and fall of several nations, such as the waning of Portuguese power, the rise and fall of Germany and Japan, and the rise of the British and French and their eventual weakening. The end of this period was marked by the eventual power shift from Europe to the US and the rise of the Soviet juggernaut after World War II. The present world was more or less in place by then in the form of humanistic values, world institutions, nation-states, and the problems we face today, such as poverty, economic disparity, climate problems and power imbalance in favour of some countries. During this time, the idea of humanism remained constant and expressed itself in numerous ideologies, most notably in the form of individualism. At the same time, the three big Muslim Empires begin to recede and crumble. This process essentially began due to their

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<sup>20</sup> Hopkins, Eric. *Industrialisation and society: a social history, 1830-1951*. Routledge, 2013.

international weaknesses, contradictions and infighting but the coup de grace came from the British and European military intervention.

The reason Spanish and Portuguese power waned and made way for French and British colonial encroachments during this period can perhaps be traced to the support of some powerful families and business houses that controlled the early banking systems and trade. These houses shifted favours towards France and Britain and, in some cases, supported both sides when they went to war with each other. This may well be the first signs of Zionist powers playing behind the scenes. While Zionism in its incumbent form emerged in the 20th Century, powerful Jewish families controlled banking and trade during the Late Modern Age. Apparently, Western colonialism is a story of Christian kingdoms expanding and taking over and looting the world. However, a relatively less studied aspect of this period is the role of small but powerful Jewish minorities in shaping the policies of these kingdoms. Even the penchant for controlling the East and ending Muslim domination might have been more of a Jewish desire, for they consider themselves a people of the Middle East.

The British, arguably, have the most prominent role in creating the world as it exists today. Before deliberating further on British colonialism, let us compare the contrasting economic condition of the colonies and victims of European aggression before and after the Late Modern Period. Before the Europeans had a sniff of the East, China and India had the largest GDPs in the world. Even at the beginning of the 19th Century, Indian GDP was several times the size of the UK GDP. However, by the end of the 19th Century, the Indian share in the world GDP had shrunk to only 2% from being a quarter of the world GDP previously. The term "the third world", commonly used to describe the developing countries, results from a deliberate policy of the West, particularly Britain. These countries were colonised, directly or

indirectly, robbed of their resources, exploited for raw materials, and deindustrialised as per policy.

With the growth of industrialisation in Western Europe, the colonies mainly supplied raw material and became the recipient of finished goods. For example, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, India was forced to supply raw material to Britain. India grew cotton and sent it to mills in Manchester to be converted into cloth, which would be sent back to India and sold at inflated prices. It supplied wheat that was turned into cakes and bread in bakeries in Britain. It supplied the coal that fuelled the steamships carrying British soldiers and commerce around the world.

The process of deindustrialising the colonies, such as India, was quite brutal. For example, the British began destroying the cloth industry in India by smashing hand looms. When the weavers started to produce cloth by themselves in hiding, they went on a hunt for them and cut off their thumbs. They destroyed the industry and the cottage industries and even erased the knowledge they were based upon. Industrial activity was banned for even co-opted Indian rulers of princely states, let alone common masses. The princes were only allowed to loan money to the British, who would then decide at what interest rates they would pay back the money, if at all.

The later stages of this period saw the emergence of independence movements among the colonised people. However, it is critical to note that Western ideas heavily influenced these independence movements in the East. Ideals and values such as liberty, western democracy, individualism were at the heart of these struggles. These movements were primarily led by Western-educated nouveau elites who loved the Western way of life and thinking but were exasperated by the exploitation of Western governments. They, therefore, made a naïve distinction between the exploitative governments and putatively glorious values and ideals. They aspired to rid



the colonies of the Western rulers but wished to embrace and apply the western ideas. This was a common feature of nearly all such movements, for example, the Indian independence movement, the Filipino independence movements, and those in other places in the East. There were, of course, some exceptions—for example, a Shia led revolt in southern Iraq in the 1920s. Or the beginnings of an Islamic movement in Iran that did not aspire to western ideals but envisaged an Islamic government, albeit in a preliminary way.

This, more or less, sums up the discussion on the Late Modern Age and brings us to what is referred to as the Contemporary Age beginning with the end of World War II.

During this period, nations in the East began to gain independence. The formation of newly independent nation-states began in Asia with India and the Philippines and then spread to Africa. The process continued till the 1970s. The newly independent states continued to grapple with the disconnect between their past and present. Most of these states have faced economic problems, ethnic tensions and even wars in some cases. The Westernised natives who ruled most of these lands have aspired to install western ideals in the societies after the people drove out colonisers.

Overall, the period is marked with the post-World War II world in which the United Nations emerged as the most important international institution in the world. The early financial systems started to further mature, becoming more powerful over time. The world for decades found itself in the midst of the Cold War between the competing Western and Soviet blocs. The US first replaced Europe as the leader of the so-called free world and eventually emerged as the sole superpower in the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The spread and rise of global corporations and their exponentially growing power changed power dynamics by highlighting the role of non-

state actors in international affairs. The world witnessed unprecedented communications and technological advancements, especially in the last four decades.

A significant feature of the post-World War II world is an indirect form of colonialism. As the previously colonised people asserted themselves and gained freedom, their colonisers left behind political and economic systems that have kept the post-colonial states dependent. These systems have ensured a continuous flow of resources and wealth from the poor or periphery states to the stronger or core states, enriching the latter at the cost of the former. The issue has been explored in detail by "dependency theorists". This form of new colonialism has further impoverished post-colonial states in Africa, Latin America and Asia, despite being putatively free.

The problem has been further compounded by the relationship the elite in the post-colonial states have with the Western countries and cultures. They are mostly Western-educated, they stash their usually ill-gotten money in Western banks, their children study and live in the West (until they return to replace their parents). This forms a cycle of dependency, as well as a case of internal colonialism as a concomitant of new colonialism. Latin America has been exploited by the US under new colonialism, Africa mainly by Britain, French and Belgians, while Asia most recently by the US.

The Western countries, especially the US, has ensured this system remains in place and has even militarily intervened on instances where it has perceived threats to its interests. The US, through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), has actively set up governments, brought down governments, organised secret and brazen coup d'états, and even attacked countries at will to ensure this system remains in place. Allende's Chile, Mossadeq's Iran and Bhutto's Pakistan are a few examples of the CIA's involvement in coup

d'états. Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan are some examples of US attacks on sovereign nations. There are also recent examples of Syria and Yemen where US-backed terrorist militias and puppet regimes have waged wars on Muslim states with US support.

In the domain of values and ideas, humanism has marched apace and unabated. Europe has become intensely godless in the last few decades. The US not as much as Europe, but it has still become relatively godless. The hippie movement and the sexual revolution of the 1960s changed moral and sexual values. Acceptance of homosexuality is but one of its examples. What was once considered a taboo has been normalised, even given legal protection, and normalcy has been criminalised. There are, nonetheless, protests against such travesties, such as the massive protest in France against same-sex marriage legislation.

A significant feature of this period of world history is a series of new independence movements, beginning with the Islamic Revolution of Iran and gradually spreading to others parts of the Muslim world. The earlier independence movements had been Western-inspired struggles against European rule. But the new movements are inspired by a new theory that we ought to shape all aspects of our lives as God wants it. This is a departure from the farce of humanism that had culminated into godlessness.

Islamic revolution is vehemently opposed to the idea of God having no role in the collective lives of humans. Instead, it says that we want to lead our lives, shape our societies and our political systems based on God's will. If need be, we are going to fight and make sacrifices. We are going to rightfully do whatever ought to be done, but we shall achieve this goal. An Islamic way of life shall not only ensure us a wonderful afterlife but helps us enjoy success, dignity and material comfort in this world. Islamic revolution is not based solely on the need and desire to fight others and embrace

martyrdom. It is not purely otherworldly but values a comfortable and honourable life in conformance with God's wish.

The Islamic Revolution of Iran has set an example for other Muslim states and people in this regard. Ever since the revolution in 1979, Iran has surmounted numerous existential challenges and emerged stronger. It has grown and become powerful as a state. The idea of the Islamic revolution has further developed and spread to other Muslim populations, many of whom now ask of their rulers that if Iran can implement Islam in its true sense, stand up to the bullying of Western powers and remain successful, why can't they adopt an Islamic way of life? They rightfully object to being duped into following the West with false excuses such as being illiterate, poor, unable to handle their own affairs, and consequently forced to accept Western domination. Even worse, in some cases, the elites have convinced the masses of Western superiority and their way of life as the only proper one towards which everyone should work. For them, Iran has been foolish in fighting the West and standing against the force of history.

The reality, however, is different. Those Muslim states continue to remain poor, politically weak and economically dependent on the West. They have gained nothing and even lost their dignity. On the other hand, Iran has become self-reliant in almost all fields. It continues to grow militarily, politically and economically with dignity while remaining faithful to Islamic teachings. Iran's development, coupled with the unease among their public, has caused aching concern and fear among the puppet Muslim rulers. They not only consider and call Iran a problem for the world but are in cahoots with the US and Zionist forces to harm the Islamic Revolution. They have sunk to a level that in a recent Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) meeting regarding the US decision to move its embassy in the Occupied Palestinian territories to Jerusalem, the representative of Bahrain reminded

the participants that the Palestinian issue could wait since Iran was the actual problem that needed immediate attention.

Muslims have undoubtedly had high points of glory throughout their history. But the defining feature of the genuine present-day Islamic revolutions and movements around the world, that in the words of Ayatullah Ali Khāmenāi, should now be referred to as the New Islamic Civilisation is it being Shī'a led.

The Shī'a had always had a vital role in the growth of sciences and knowledge. In the earlier phases of Muslim civilisation, their role wasn't as pronounced due to the paucity of their numbers or the hatred against them. Nonetheless, if we trace much of the intellectual development during those times, we come across generations of numerous Shī'a scholars. Through these scholars and their teachers, the erstwhile intellectual movement can be traced back to the Shī'a Imams. Similarly, in certain Shī'a kingdoms such as the Safavid, the scholars played a defining role politically and intellectually in given circumstances. However, the New Islamic Civilisation is led by the Shī'a politically as well as intellectually.

The New Islamic Movement is remarkable because it has correctly identified its opposition and challenges both the Western political dominance and its cultural and civilisational outreach. The success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran has inspired an axis of political resistance. People who refuse to bow to illegitimate power and want to live their lives as per God's wish. It presents an alternative to the materialistic and humanistic way of life, and has proven that the totalitarian modernistic way is not the only way of life.

The Islamic revolution has displayed remarkable suppleness and wisdom in the way it has conducted its domestic and international affairs. It has become stronger, self-reliant and economically robust at home – a long cry since the days of dependence on the West. Internationally it has been

responsible but assertive where required. It has identified its foes correctly and forged long-term solid alliances with its friends. It has been able to strike partnerships of interests with states it may not share much in common except transient confluence on interests. The alliances with Venezuela and Russia may be a case in point.

It is relevant to mention here that Western Civilisation is not limited to North America and Europe but covers Japan, South Korea and even China to some extent. China and the US might be ostensible enemies, but beyond the superficial economic competition, there is a confluence of ideas and interests. On a larger canvas of materialistic and human-centric worldview, they are partners. It is yet to be seen for how long China resists adopting Western ways of life, but even sans that, they are materialistic and godless. The proof for these differences being superficial and their conflating interests is the immediate reintegration of Germany and acceptance of Japan into the Western world order after World War II. More than 50 million people were killed, countries were razed to the ground, nuclear bombs were used, but it was all rosy soon after.