

CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY: A RESPONSE BASED ON MAQASID AL-SHARI‘AH THEORY

*Ishfaq Amin Parrey**

Abstract: Consumerism is a buzzword within contemporary lingua-franca, being an axiomatic expression for modern lifestyles. The modern man, it is said, is a consumer. The term refers to the consumption of commodities - tangible and intangible - so that modern man is defined in terms of what he consumes. This paper explores the phenomenon of consumerism as an indispensable column of the modern hegemonic order, which is neo-liberal, capitalistic, and globalised. The paper highlights the issue of identity crisis vis-à-vis consumer behaviour and looks into various notions of the self, formed to shape an individual's sense of being. The fundamentals of the Islamic worldview vis-à-vis the inter-relationship of the elements of the cosmos is then examined. The paper will delve into the deeper meaning of Qur'anic concepts like *khilafah*, *'ubudiyah*, etc. and their implications for Muslim identity formation, as well as the formation of specific behaviours. It tries to critically evaluate the tectonic phenomenon of consumerism from the perspective of *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the higher intentions of Islamic law). Finally, the paper proposes an Islamic perspective on civilisational renewal, one which is more natural and helps to construct a positive relationship with the self and the outer cosmos, coupling human interests with *maqasid al-shari'ah*. The paper finally offers some policy recommendations for reformed engagement with the self and the cosmos in terms of justice and fairness.

Keywords: Consumerism, Self-identity, *Khalifah*, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, *'Ubudiyah*, *Israf*, *Tabdhir*.

Introduction

Consumerism is the compulsive desire to consume natural resources in either their organic form or as artificial derivatives. As a process, consumerism is regulated through the buying of goods and services coupled with “the belief that it is good for a society or an individual person to buy and use a large quantity of goods and services”¹ in order to satiate ephemeral cravings. Consumerism is not a choice but a sine quo non within the global culture of modernity. The term is an expression of the claim that modern societies are distinct from traditional ones in terms of their social organisation, being based around consumerism. When characterising a consumer society, the following are central assertions. First,

rising affluence means increased monetary potential to be used on acquiring goods and services. Second, the availability of more time is for the pursuit of leisure, which is inversely proportional to one's working hours. Third, a consumer draws his sense of identity from consumer activities conducted during leisure time. Fourth, the aestheticisation of everyday life helps form a lifestyle based on images, thereby encouraging the purchase of commodities structured around fantasy rather than need. Fifth, in a consumer society, the acquisition of goods acts as a marker of social position, contrasting with pre-modern societies, where race, gender, or tribal affiliation performed this function. Sixth, consumers are the prime drivers of production and hence derive more power and authority, such that in certain respects consumers replace citizens, economic behaviour political rights and duties. Lastly, human experience is being commodified and offered for consumption, resulting in the extension of the market into all spheres of life.²

Although, the idea of consumption can be found in all human cultures, only contemporary modernity sees consumerism as a foundational principle. This paper examines the coercive influences of consumerism that result in both the formation of a distinct sense of self-identity and the erosion of traditional centralising identities. This is related to the sociological metamorphosis of traditional societies into modern industrialised ones, a process generally termed modernisation. During this process, the secularisation of state institutions weakens the influence of religious traditions on personal and social life, leading to a deterioration in the observance of a sacred relationship with the cosmos. The process of secularisation is, in other words, a process of de-sacralisation. The shift in man's status from producer to consumer has completely changed his relationship with life.

Modern consumerism is at odds with the Islamic worldview, particularly the equivalency Islam draws between humans and other forms of life, with the former being stewards in this universe. Capitalistic notions of acquisition place human desire as the centre of human existence, replacing a God-centric approach to life. Consumeristic ways of life have permeated the world, to the point that, irrespective of religious identity, people associate themselves with what they consume. This consumption may be in terms of foods, clothing, entertainment, art, or (most importantly) patterns of thinking. This paper is an Islamic response to this hedonistic culture. It attempts to address issues of authentic human welfare from the position of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, as a core concern in Islamic thought. It endeavours to make the case for a de-colonial analysis of human identity, of the relationship between humans and their natural environment, in order to reclaim sacred patterns of thinking and living.

The Historical Roots of Modern Consumerism

Modernity refers to the mode of social organisation that first emerged in post-Renaissance Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards, and which subsequently became influential worldwide.³ With capitalism as its prime driver, this form of social order encourages the acquisition of possessions, which it facilitates in ever-increasing amounts. Consumerism, like science and democracy, has become part of the modern world order.⁴ Consumerism has not only economic and material facets, but moral, political, and spiritual dimensions, too.

Determining the historical roots of consumerism, Peter Stearns comments, is difficult. Generally, it can be related to increased international trade and accelerating global urbanisation. It was from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries that consumerism first emerged as a system. During the mid-eighteenth century, consumer societies flourished in Britain and France, and parts of Germany and Italy.⁶ The economic, political, and social changes brought about by capitalist industrialisation in nineteenth-century Europe, termed a “great transformation,” developed consumerism/consumer culture at a rate never witnessed in human history before. It has been argued that the Industrial Revolution necessitated a change in the production and consumption of goods. In this setting, money making became an objective in itself, being the extension of processes of consumption, which represented a break with tradition. It is argued that in traditional European cultures, Christian ethics defined attitudes towards production, while consumer culture embraced Romanticism, with its powerful expression of individuality morphing into patterns of consumption.⁷ From this, the idea of man as consumer gained currency, leading ultimately to the development of a modern, hegemonic consumerist civilisation.

The Economics of Consumer Culture: A Brief Overview

According to the World Watch Institute, people around the globe spent \$30.5 trillion on goods and amenities during 2006. Expenditure included basic necessities, like food and housing, but also consumer goods, from rich foods to larger homes to conveniences like televisions, cars, computers, and air travel. In 2008 alone, people around the world purchased 68 million vehicles, 85 million refrigerators, 297 million computers, and 1.2 billion mobile phones.⁸ Consumption has grown dramatically over the past five decades, showing an upward trend from \$4.9 trillion in 1960 to \$23.6 trillion in 1996, up six fold. Some of this increase is due to population growth, which reached a factor of 2.2 between 1960 and 2006. Nevertheless, consumption expenditure almost tripled per person during this period.⁹

This unprecedented rise in consumer behaviour has penetrated all strata of the social, economic, and cultural spectrum, giving rise to consumer culture. Robert Dunn observes that modern consumer culture is “an inevitable consequence of the ever-rising consumption requirements of an evolving capitalist economy.”¹⁰ Dunn observes that consumer culture is characterised by an unmatched interpenetration of economic and cultural forces. It represents an “intertwining of the logic of growing markets within the new cultural logics of advanced communications, information technologies, and entertainment industries.” Dunn notes that the modern idea of a social framework, coupled with philosophies like individualism and self-fulfilling happiness, are the core traits of consumerism. He observes:

Consumer culture is part of the modern take off commodification and as such, presupposes and further develops a social/cultural framework of individualism and an ethos of democratized pleasure and self-fulfillment, all in a market setting. Consumption in advanced capitalist society thus has a dual nature in which the economic and cultural are both internally specialized but simultaneously fused.¹¹

Consumerism and consumer culture add to their economic and cultural interoperability the need to address human happiness at the non-physical level of individual needs and wants. The satiating of those needs and wants, however, goes beyond the limits of those needs and wants. Robert Dunn describes consumer culture as a breeding ground for the espousal of consumption, resulting in pleasure for its own sake, as the end of the process. Thus, Dunn explains:

The essence of consumerism is the principle that consumption is an end-in-itself, its own justification. Deeply rooted in the profit motive, consumerism is now a widely shared ideology and worldview capable of creating strong attachments to consumption as a way of life, based on a belief in the enduring power of material possessions and commercial distractions to bring happiness and personal fulfillment. Through consumerism, the experience of self and other is increasingly framed by the idea that life’s meaning is reducible to the purchase, ownership and use of commodities signify about the person.¹²

Consumerism and Self Identity: An Identity Crisis

The one unequivocal result of modern capitalism is that individuals are identified by what they consume.¹³ This has inflicted a general notion of crisis about ideas of the self, including the sense of self, how selfhood is formed and developed

through social activities. It is the central concern of what is sometimes called identity crisis, being an expression of a loss of meaning. Bauman notes that in a consumer society, the idea of self-identity is fed by a “combination of consumers, constantly greedy for new attractions and fast bored with attractions already had, and of the world transformed in all its dimensions – economic, political or personal.”¹⁴ Dunn points out that the social roles, identities, attitudes, values, and structures underlying daily life have undergone a fundamental shift as a consequence of a relative decline in the importance of production coupled with a rise in consumption as a way of life.¹⁵ Hence, in contemporary modern culture, the idea of selfhood, or the means of forming social identity, is influenced by consumerist attitudes. Consequently, consumerism defines our way of life, combining high levels of material affluence while emphasising the symbolic and emotional meanings associated with possessions – both acquired and consumed.

Consumerism sometimes refers to the anthropological and biological phenomena of purchasing goods and consuming in excess of basic need. Defining consumerism in terms of the commercialisation and commodification of daily life, Lodziak observes:

Consumerism – the increasing commercialization and commodification of everyday life, the growing volume of commodities in circulation, and the fact that almost everybody at least in the advanced capitalist societies, addresses their needs and wants by purchasing goods, services and experiences rather than providing these for themselves.¹⁶

Consumerism, as an essential source of modern life, influencing the outlooks of individuals and social organisations, can be observed in four major ways:¹⁷

1. Individuals begin to ascribe extraordinarily high worth to their own actions, coupled with a right to decide their own version of ‘truth,’ thereby dislocating themselves from traditional masters like the ‘clergy’. **Individualism** becomes narcissism in later stages while typically avoiding communitarianism.
2. As members of various social groups socialise, each individual comes to enjoy a right to their own individualistic ‘truth,’ in so far as it is supplementary to **pluralism**. Anything damaging to plurality is termed intolerant and irrational.
3. The activities, attitudes, and aspirations of individuals become obsessed with gratification, pleasure-seeking, and leisure, or **hedonism**. Drinking, over-consumption, over-eating, and having more sex are meant to satiate and empower.
4. Individuals turn away from a perceived “non-stimulating real world” to **romanticism**, where they can “dwell on the greater pleasures imaginative scenarios can offer.” Imaginary, fantastical, illusionary, and artistic worlds

stress the uniqueness of individuals, self-expression, and self-experience, all accompanied by the ethical principle of self-development, which rejects a common status shared by all humans.

Consumerism is considered a key element of the Western, liberal democratic polity whose capitalistic economic centre promotes these ideas of individualism, pluralism, hedonism, and romanticism. Consumer culture, as an economic and cultural enterprise embedded in industrialisation, negates traditional ways of life and identity formation without offering a sustained solution to the consequent problems of identity. This is illustrated by the fashion industry: as a tool of individual identity focused on the ‘consumer subject,’ it constitutes a fluid individualistic exercise producing heterogeneous ideas of self that remain in continuous flux, negating any trace of the homogenous self found in traditional cultures. This fluctuation of identity conceptualisation hampers self-definition and self-identification, and hence becomes translated into an identity crisis.

In the vast array of social-psychological literature, the self is hypothesised to be an individualistic, acultural, apolitical, free-thinking, free-acting entity who is specifiable, measurable, ordered, and rational.¹⁸ Theories of self-identity in social psychology are founded on an individualistic ontology that supposes an individual minus his socio-cultural context.¹⁹ This ‘reductionist’ approach delegitimises the historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts that shape individuals. In these terms, the self is expressed using five different concepts:²⁰

The Commodified Self, or when the self is transformed into a commodity to be packaged, presented, and sold like any other commodity. This process of commodification is a pervasive characteristic of consumer culture, where personality is defined by one’s ability to be attractive, aggressive, and charming to others, to stand out in a crowd as distinctive and exclusive. The conduct predicated by these features corresponds to the neo-liberal capitalist principles of self-governance. Hence, the idea of success is built upon an individual’s self-referent understanding and expression of identity, which is packaged and offered in the market place for the purpose of achieving control and service.²¹ Since the consumer mistakes contemporary social behavioural patterns as a universal feature of the human condition, the neo-liberal economic system produces an inverted (or false) consciousness.²²

The Narcissist Self, or when behavioural and emotional states peculiar to consumer culture, and characterised by social simulation and conspicuous consumption,²³ become associated with consumer products and services. Slater refers to this phenomenon as “the cult of self” in which “other people and social

relations are perceived only in terms of their implications for maintaining a self-identity.²⁴ Chris Lasch contrasts this self-obsession with experiences of isolation, anonymity, and superficiality. Lasch, in *The Culture of Narcissism*, invokes Freud's concept of narcissism to understand the shift from production to consumption-based society.²⁵ Freud conceptualised narcissism as consisting of two sub-categories: primary and secondary. Primary narcissism was a normative developmental stage experienced during early infancy, while secondary narcissism was a pathology experienced by adults who regressively take themselves as their primary love-object.²⁶

The Distinctive Self, or when group membership is central to the definition of self-identity, shaping attitudes, compliance, categorisations, and overall organisational behaviour. While this theory provides an in-depth analysis of self-identity, it is also one-dimensional.²⁷ Social groups and hierarchies are deeply influenced by consumer culture via the experiences and 'consciousness' produced by the latter through its artefacts, which ideate the imagination, defining good taste and cultural capital. As Lury notes,²⁸ consumer culture shapes the development of relationships, individual self-assembly, and group membership.

In such a cultural setting, individual distinctions and social comparisons expressed through an ability to manipulate the signs and symbols of consumer culture are a way of constructing a desired self-identity. As Baudrillard observes:

The principle of analysis remains as follows: you never consume the object in itself (in its use value): you are always manipulating objects (in its broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status.²⁹

Bourdieu³⁰ refers to these abilities as 'taste,' which he argues is an indicator of one's social status. The gaining of 'good taste' or 'bad taste' places individuals and groups within a social hierarchy. The ability to manipulate these signs in order to gain a specific 'taste' is practiced in various spheres, like the arts, literature, sports, food, architecture, etc.

The Gendered Self, referring to how consumer culture produces female identity in two ways: as domestic servants who bring joy and well-being to the family or in terms of liberalism and narcissism.³¹ In the first case, women who are identified as wives and mothers are conceptualised as caretakers and caregivers in relation to their capability to use household commodities.³² In the second case, with the advances made by feminism in the 1970s, consumerism has argued for the

emancipation of women, replacing traditional feminine identities with notions of self rooted in independence, self-discovery, and self-realisation. Within this context, women's self-identity has become increasingly tied to body image, asserting sexuality in more definite ways. The advertisement industry in particular has deliberately played with female sexuality, portraying women as always 'up for sex.'³³ Regarding male self-identity, this has also become increasingly interpreted in terms of commodity use. In traditional consumer discourse, production was correlated with men and consumption with women. This depiction has been fundamentally challenged, however,³⁴ starting in the post-second world war era. Prior to that, men's self-identities were linked to home-based construction – as husbands and fathers.³⁵ Modern consumer culture, although also focused on the home, sees the latter as a site of commodification and consumption. The home has become a site of demarcation in identity based on gender vis-à-vis the act of perpetual consumption, maintaining 'commodified' romantic relationships and family life.³⁶

The Discursive Self, embodied in the greater agility – occupational and geographic – consumer culture offers concerning lifestyle, travel opportunities, and spiritual practices. The freedom and opportunities offered by consumerism encompasses the choosing of how we see ourselves. This freedom is expressed through the way we dress, our hairstyling, choice of makeup, and through our expression of taste. Self-identity produced through consumption tends to be brief, transient, and temporary because of the nature of consumerism itself, which ruthlessly re-invents and re-packages messages, narratives, images, values, and lifestyles.³⁷ This fluidity replaces the idea of a self-identity that is stable and secure.³⁸ In this tectonic process, the centre around which people construct themselves, individually and collectively, is lost. A universal moral authority that guides and shapes coherent human modes of thinking and behaviour, and the ground for defining and building human character, is similarly lost. The constant flux and fluidity inherent within consumerism keeps the notion of self-identity in a state of unrest and aimlessness.⁴⁰ This persistent flux in consumer culture gives rise to a sense of disorientation, with people becoming uncertain about their place in society, leading to a 'fragmentation' of the self.⁴¹ Regarding contemporary consumer culture and how it relates to identity negotiation through symbols, Baudrillard argues:

As a language, consumption is a way in which we converse and communicate with one another. Once we think of consumption as a language, we are free to deploy the whole panoply of tools derived from structural linguistics including sign, signifier, signified and code. As a

result, instead of Marxian use-value and exchange-values, consumables become sign values.⁴²

Here, Baudrillard points to the dilemma faced by subjects of consumer culture: the sense of self derived from their acts of consumption is in constant flux. On the one hand, individuals attempt to fashion a sense of self-identity in tune with continually shifting referents, while on the other they are caught up in web of power relations they are hardly aware of. While these discourses provide a sense of freedom exercised through individual choice, consumer autonomy is not what it seems.

Islam and the Order of the Cosmos: Reclaiming the Sacred in the Intra-Cosmic Realm

In Islam, everything on earth is held to be a creation of God, which worships Him alone. This worship is not a mere ritual exercise, but denotes the state of submission practiced and experienced by all creatures on earth. Within this context, humans are held responsible for the welfare and sustenance of other organic and inorganic parts of the earth's environment, being vicegerents (*khalifah*) appointed by God. Various Qur'anic verses posit a clear and positive nexus between humanity and the world around them, denying any absolute authority or right to exploitation and monopolisation. Rather, everything is created as a cosmic signpost towards the realisation of God's existence. Among the verses which outline this relationship are:

O mankind, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may become righteous. (He) who made for you the earth a bed (spread out) and the sky a ceiling and sent down from the sky, rain and brought forth thereby fruits as provision for you. So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know (that there is nothing similar to Him).⁴³

This verse establishes a sense of selfhood for human beings. It ordains worship, establishing the relationship between man and his Creator as *ta'bbudi* (ritualistic). This relationship is exactly what it means to be a Muslim, to be the one who consciously submits his being before the Lord. On the other hand, this verse also maintains that God created everything beneficial for the sustenance of humankind. In another verse (2:30), the Qur'an maintains that humankind represents the Will of God on earth and hence should not monopolise the gifts bestowed by the Lord so as to act as gods themselves. This necessitates

the maintenance of a healthy relationship with other species on earth, so that humankind exercises righteousness and gratitude. Attributing equals to God lies at the root of all evil and harm (*mafsadah*), disturbing the cosmological hierarchy. This will lead to devastating results in both the physical and metaphysical realms by disrupting the order of rights and duties (*zulm al-adheem*), as found in surah Luqman.⁴⁴ Some other Qur'anic verses offering significant details on this subject include:

The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts (Allah) by His praise, but you do not understand their (way of) exalting. Indeed, He is ever Forbearing and Forgiving.⁴⁵

We will show them our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.⁴⁶

In the above verses, there is a shift from necessary servitude (*al-'ubudiyah al-idhtirariyyah*) to volitional servitude (*al-'ubudiyah al-ikhtiyariyyah*) towards God. The state of exalting God in ways that are not comprehensible is necessary servitude. To observe these subtle signs in the cosmos is to perceive signposts towards God. This will in turn drive the perceiver (humankind) towards volitional servitude towards God. Hence, a sacred relationship is established between humankind and the rest of creation. In the desired state of *al-'ubudiyah al-ikhtiyariyyah*, it is impossible for man to misuse his stature of *khalifah*; to do so would be tantamount to considering oneself a god. So, principally, the concept of *tawhid* crafts a compassionate relationship between various elements of creation.

The collective natural state of the created cosmos is servitude and submission before the Almighty Lord. It is this state of *fitrah* that constructs a natural, intra-cosmic order of productive and sustainable interdependence. This interdependence, emanating from the Islamic principle of *tawhid*, as pointed out by Kamali, underlines the unicity of nature as an ecological principle and a distinctive feature of environmental science. In this system, we observe a cyclical inter-dependence, where the mineral kingdom sustains the plant kingdom, the plant kingdom supports the animal kingdom, and so on.⁴⁷ On the observance of this natural order, Syed Hussain Nasr aptly states:

The Islamic view of the natural order and the environment as everything else that is Islamic, has its roots in the Qur'an, the very Word of God, which is [the] central theophany of Islam. The message of the Qur'an is in a sense a return to the primordial message of God to man. It addresses

what is primordial in the inner nature of men and women, hence Islam is called the primordial religion (*al-din al-hanif*). As the “Primordial Scripture”, the Qur’an addresses not only men and women but the whole of the cosmos. In a sense, nature participates in the Qur’anic revelation. Certain verses of the Qur’an address natural forms as well as human beings, while God calls non-human members of His creation, such as plants and animals, the sun and the stars, to bear witness in certain other verses.⁴⁸

Drawing together the relation between man and the cosmos, between the revelation of God in terms of the unity of the Originator of the ontological Qur’an (*al-Qur’an al-takwini*) and the written Qur’an (*al-Qur’an al-tadwini*), Nasr argues that the Qur’an does not differentiate between the world of man and the world of nature. The Qur’an does not assume the world of nature is an adversary to be conquered. Rather, the Qur’an inculcates in man the idea of nature as an integral part of religious life. Hence, the correlation between *al-Qur’an al-takwini* (the cosmic Qur’an) and *al-Qur’an al-tadwini* (the written Qur’an) reflects the theological relation between the Word of God as revealed to the prophets and the creative Word of God as the essence of everything existent. Nasr observes a direct connection between cosmic phenomenon, or what the Qur’an refers to as *ayat*, and verses with the holy book, also termed *ayat*, which in both cases act as signposts or symbols towards God. Nasr opines that the sage who reads the cosmic book and observes the spectacle of nature sees the “signs of the Author of the Book of nature.”⁴⁹

The relationship between man and creation is essentially spiritual. Together they form a cosmic whole pointing to the Absolute Reality, negating any notion that man has hegemonic control over other forms of life. In this regard, Islam’s spiritual and philosophical traditions offer a parallel, all-inclusive, moral idea of the cosmos running against modern capitalistic, de-sacralised, hegemonic, and essentially narcissistic conceptions. Nasr invokes the sacred nature of the environment, arguing that delving into the sacred relationship between the Creator and His creation demonstrates that divinity belongs to God alone. The created realm is sacred as a manifestation of the creative act of God,⁵⁰ as something that comes from His will and is reflective of His wisdom. Nasr comments:

Nature reflects the Wisdom (*hikma*) and His Will (*irada*), as also the Qur’an repeats in different places that it was created in truth and not falsehood. Nature is not there only for our use. It is there to reflect [the] creative power of God, and grace, or *baraka*, also flows in the arteries and veins of the universe. Human beings are created to be a channel of

grace for the cosmic ambience around them. Creatures in the world of nature not only have a relation with beings and through them with God, they also have a direct relation with God and possess an eschatological significance.⁵¹

Within this context, the universe and all life in it reflects the grace of God, as showered upon humankind. Realisation of this grace necessitates '*ubudiyah*', both necessary and volitional, as a state of thankfulness. This state of '*ubudiyah*' and thankfulness demands rejection of self-centred, hedonistic, and narcissistic ways of life – or, the foundations of consumer culture.

Islamic Values of Servitude ('*Ubudiyah*') and Vicegerency (*Khilafah*): A Quest for Essential-Universal Identity

The Qur'an identifies man as the servant of God, the sole reason for his existence being to prove his '*ubudiyah*' (servitude) towards God alone.⁵² The status of '*ubudiyah*' both elevates and humbles human beings. It elevates them because it entails that they live only for the Almighty Lord, the source of all goodness and beauty, while it humbles them because it makes them answerable to God for all their deeds and actions, whether with regards to the rights of God (*huquq Allah*) or the rights of His creation (*huquq al-'ibad*). In relation to the creation of God, man is given the status of *khalifah*, meaning the one who carries out the will of God at both the individual and collective levels. The status of *khilafah* does not have any imperial qualities, but is rather a heavy responsibility bestowed by God on those who are to be stewards of the cosmos and carry out His Will (*qasd al-shari'*). As the Qur'an states:

And (mention O Muhammad), when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.'⁵³

To avoid the abuse of this status, the *khalifah* is made mindful of his *amanah*⁵⁴ (trusteeship), which relates both to the Creator and the realm of the created. Vicegerents must be guided by the principles of moderation in demeanor (*i'tidal*) and justice (*'adl*). Kamali explains the responsibilities and nuances connected to the responsibility taken up by man (*khilafah*) thus:

Vicegerency confers on human beings, individually and collectively, the mission and responsibility to build the earth and harness its resources with moderation and care for its ecological balance (Q. *al-Baqarah* 2:30). Vicegerency is guided in turn by the principles of trusteeship

(*amanah*), moderation (*i'tidal*, *wasatiyyah*) and justice (*'adl*). Building and development (*i'mar*) with their broader physical and nonphysical ramifications are another aspects of vicegerency that is informed, in turn, by the higher goals and purposes (*maqasid*) of Islam and its *Shari'ah*.⁵⁵

In Islam, man is entitled to just usage of natural resources and their derivatives, while being cautioned against extravagance and prodigality. As the Qur'an puts it:

O you who have believed, eat from the good (i.e. lawful) things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is (indeed) Him that you worship.⁵⁶

O children Adam, take your adornment (i.e. wear your clothing) at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.⁵⁷

The Qur'an and Prophetic hadith use the terms *israf* and *tabdhir* to denote prodigality. *Israf* signifies extravagance and wasteful use of permissible things, while *tabdhir* means spending on something unlawful in shariah.⁵⁸ One who surpasses the parameters of moderation in legally permissible acts is considered prodigal (*musrif*), for example by overconsuming the bounties of God. However, those who spend their resources on acquiring unlawful things are *mubadhirun*, described in the Qur'an as the "devil's brethren."⁵⁹ These notions of *israf* and *tabdhir* accurately characterise modern consumerism, including the desire to acquire beyond one's need and satiate even the most whimsical desire. with the facets of the devil.

Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has satan been to his Lord ungrateful.⁶⁰

In Islamic psychology, the states of *zuhd* and *qana'ah* (contentment) are preferable to *musrif* (consumerism, in modern terms). Islam encourages a shift from being *musrif* towards being *zahid*, seeing it as a process of moving from being obsessed with the material world to realising its impermanence. It is necessary to tread the path of realisation towards the Truth by making minimal use of material possessions and overcoming carnal desires (*nafs*) by affirming the notion of continuous inner *jihad* towards becoming a better person. Consumer culture is at odds with this approach, defying the very fundamental intentions of shariah, most importantly the objective of protecting one's reason (*'aql*). More

broadly, to integrate the concepts of *hifz al-aql* and *hifz al-nafs* is to point towards one's original state of nature (*fitrah*) as that which connects us ontologically and epistemologically to the Absolute. To distort this state of nature is sinful, disturbing the very fundamental construction of humanity.⁶¹ Alongside this is the objective of protecting the environment (*hifz al-bi'ah*), identified by al-Qaradawi as one of the higher objectives of shariah. Quoting about 20 Qur'anic verses and numerous hadith in support of this conclusion, al-Qaradawi outlined how it is the duty of Muslims to consume the bounties of nature with sensitivity and care, proportionately with actual need.⁶² From a *maqasid* perspective, the attainment of environmental stability constitutes the acquisition of good (*jalb al-maslaha*), the prevention of all threat to our ecology the deterrence of evil (*daf' al-madarra*). This embodies the essence of shariah.

***Maqasid al-Shari'ah* and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: A Comparison**

The shariah embodies the commandments and social outlook of Islam. At the same time, all these commandments are rooted in primordial human nature. From the Qur'anic perspective, the commandments of shariah are purposive in nature, relating to the welfare of mankind in both this world and the Hereafter. A broad, one-word statement of this purpose is *tazkiyyah*,⁶³ meaning purification and growth in terms of morality and spirituality, of persuading moral conduct in this world. The Qur'an describes *tazkiyyah*⁶⁴ as the primary objective of Islam. It is with this aim in view that the Messengers of God were raised among their respective communities, as confirmed by Prophet Abraham's prayer to God, as reported in the Qur'an:

Our Lord! And send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise.⁶⁵

Besides the process of purification and growth, the shariah aims to sustain human life and enable conduct leading to welfare in this life and in the life after death. Muslim scholars agree that Islamic law is based on safeguarding and promoting human welfare. As ibn al-Qayyim states:

The Shari'ah is based upon wisdom and on the interests of the people relating to worldly transactions and the Hereafter. It is wholly and solely justice, benevolence, expediency and wisdom. It is the sine qua non of

well-being and brings about success in this life and the Hereafter.⁶⁶

With respect to the basic interests of humankind, the shariah seeks to preserve faith, life, progeny, property, and sanity – also known as the five universals. Thus, the objectives of shariah (*maqasid al-shari'ah*) have two aspects: to facilitate moral and spiritual growth while also protecting the basic interests of man to ensure a better quality of life. The shariah does not approve of inflexibility when approaching law or laying down guiding principles for personal conduct or social policy. In obliging men to obey and submit before His Will and confirm His shariah, God does not want to create hardship or ask for what falls outside of an individual's potential. Hence the legal injunctions shariah provides do not disregard the realities of human life or the differing situations that characterise it. Islamic law takes into consideration man's weakness as well as his power and potentiality. The Qur'an is explicit on this point, stating:

He has chosen you and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty.⁶⁷

Prophet Muhammad also affirmed that the norm of Islam is ease.⁶⁸ The strong commitment of Islam to justice and fairness makes the well-being (*falah*) of all humans its principal goal, as proposed by the *maqasid* model. The well-being of mankind is dependent on the well-being of his natural niche. Happiness is not therefore found in hedonism or the mere maximal acquisition of goods to satiate desire. This cannot be the goal of a Muslim society embedded in Qur'anic values. Consumerism only conforms with *maqasid al-shari'ah* if it is just and fair at all levels.

Based on the complex nature of human existence, formation of human societies, and hierarchical formation of the aiding agencies that help sustain human life and existence, *masalih* (good and the sources of good) are categorised into three categories: *darurat* (essentials), *hajjiyyat* (complimentary), and *tahsiniyyat* (embellishments). *Darurat* are indispensable values needed for human's to live in a civilised way, be it individually or collectively. Generally, *darurat* are further categorised into the five universal values mentioned above, called *al-daruriyyat al-khamsah*. *Hajjiyyat* are those values that, while less important than *darurat*, are important for the latter's establishment. *Tahsiniyyat* are embellishments, the adoption and organisation of which beautifies and facilitates ease in human life, even though they are the least important among the three categories.⁷⁰

Some scholars perceive utilitarianism in the *maqasid* model. El-Mesawi has addressed this, highlighting the distinct nature of a *maqasid*-based utility as compared to the utilitarianism of modern, Western philosophies (and actualised

in consumer culture). El-Mesawi observes the distinct nature of *maqasid al-shari'ah*:

It is significant that in the context of this *maqasid*-informed, normative utilitarianism focus is not confined to the cause-effect relationship in the theoretical consideration and practical pursuit of human interests and benefits. Equal, if not more, attention is also paid to the consequences and future outcomes (*ma'alat*) of the human acts as well as the implementation of the Shari'ah rules and commands in light of the prevailing circumstances of the present, how far remote they might be, even if they span generations, and whatever the probability of their occurrence. We are in the presence of a conception of utility which transcends individualistic, egocentric and short-sighted immediate conceptions of utility and benefit in order to embrace those of the whole society and its future generations and stretch out beyond its ethnic, nationalistic and geographic boundaries so as to be concerned with humanity at large.⁷¹

In relation to the discussion at hand, *maqasid al-shari'ah* may be defined as the interpretative method of knowing the intentions of God (*qasd al-shari'*) vis-à-vis the essential identity of humans as stewards on earth (*khalifah*), thereby conceptualising the way of life intended by the Creator. This entangled conception of life ensures the attainment of the authentic interests of humanity (*maslahah*) and the obliteration of everything detrimental to human welfare (*mafsadah*) – which is the classical way of defining *maqasid al-shari'ah*. It is a means of aligning terrestrial welfare with celestial principles. The *maqasid* interpretative model ensures production of a way of life which welcomes the greater principles (or universal values) of the cosmic order while, at the same time, striving for civilisational advancement, the greater good, and a self which is more than just a self-fulfilling 'animal'. It provides a connection between the spiritual and the material, evolving a better spirito-material idea of self. The *maqasid*-model ensures that the correlation between elements of the created cosmos and the Creator wholly stem from an ethical position that negates the perpetration of injustice (*zulm*) regarding the rights of the created cosmos (*tashriq*).

In modern psychology, 'motivational theory' attempts to explain what drives a person towards a precise ambition. Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, proposed a theory known as 'Maslow's hierarchy of needs.' This hierarchical model argued that people are motivated at five different levels:⁷²

1. Physiological, or to ensure physical survival.
2. Safety, or the provision of a safe environment in which to live.

3. Love, or the gratification of affection and belongingness.
4. Esteem, or ensuring a dignified life.
5. Self-actualisation, or the exploration of one's potential and the process of becoming.

Two additional levels of need were included later:

6. Cognitive, or the quest for knowledge and information.
7. Aesthetic, or the development of ideas about beauty and how it can be sought.

Maslow emphasised the hierarchical prioritisation of these needs, which he numbered into seven pyramidal levels, proposing that there were certain basic needs which must be met before others could be considered. For example, social groupings, social associations, and belonging are dependent on love and the need to harmoniously co-exist in different social settings. Consciousness of the needs and wants of individuals will naturally lead to community development. The principal focus of this hierarchy is therefore how attitudes are stimulated by the human desire and drive to meet societal needs. Additionally, some preconditions exist for basic need satisfaction, including the freedom to speak, express oneself, do what one likes (unless harm is perpetrated on others), seek information, and defend oneself. Justice, fairness, honesty, and orderliness are also important. These preconditions are essential for realising any basic need.⁷³

Maslow's theory of needs is the foundational reference point for capitalistic notions of human interaction, cementing the philosophical undercurrents of neo-liberal capitalism – of which consumerism is a facet.⁷⁴ Since Maslow's hierarchy is primarily invoking needs rooted in human desire, those needs inhabit the unconscious (in psychoanalytical terms), which works 'irrationally' and has the potential to be manipulated. This is at complete odds with Islamic theology, tending to make 'desire' into a god. The Qur'an is clear about not letting 'desire' become a god (*illah*).⁷⁵ Instead, the *maqasid* model is based upon genuine human good, which is universal in nature and guided by sources of revelation, connecting Muslims to their essential, innate capacities of being '*abd* (bondsmen) and their role as *khalifa* (vicegerent), which in turn translate into salvation in both worlds, the here and hereafter, by living the life intended by God.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Identity is central to human existence, being how we express our idea of self –

that is, who we are, what we want to do, and how we relate to creation and our creator. The abusive consumerism of modernity is not simply about commodity consumption, but rather permeates deep into human consciousness, redefining our conceptualisation of selfhood. In this context, this paper has brought forward a *maqasid*-based understanding of Islam. This not only helps us categorise our idea of consumption, but also brings us back to the sacred when engaging with the cosmos. It combines the concept of *khilafah* with *'ubudiyyah*, to infuse humanity with humility, responsibility, and accountability before God. The study argues that humanity's sustainability is possible only in terms of an organic cosmic whole, of living justly and fairly with regards to all other forms of life. The world is an examination and humans will be held responsible for what they do in the cosmic schemata.

To highlight the value of a *maqasid*-based approach to the contemporary, artificially created challenges faced by humanity, specifically with regards to consumerism, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is an immediate need for alternative worldviews to that of the modern, neo-liberal capitalist, who is essentially Western-orientated and hegemonic. New worldviews should be anti-colonial, indigenous, and respectful of the natural environment.
2. Further studies should be conducted on the effects of consumerism on the natural environment and our sense of identity. These studies should be from the perspective of coloniality and psychoanalysis vis-à-vis non-European geographies and ethnicities.
3. There is a need to better understand how relationships between different species embody sacredness. The emergence of consumer culture has a lot to do with the de-sacralisation of cosmic relationships in the wake of secularisation and the absence of morality characteristic of modernity.
4. Islam elevates humankind to the position of *khalifah* and charges him with disseminating God's intent in this world. It is this ability to either uphold God's intent or spread corruption that ultimately determines whether humankind flourishes. All possible platforms should be used to imbibe this notion into Muslims worldwide, while also introducing it to non-Muslims.
5. There is a need to redefine the idea of happiness beyond the acquisition of material goods.
6. There should be more policies maintaining sustainability as the equation between humans and the cosmos.
7. Seminars and workshops should be held to teach Muslims about consumerism, its adverse effects on our sense of self and the planet around us, and to educate them about *maqasid al-shari'ah* as a tool for interpreting and implementing God's will.

Notes

- * *Ishfaq Amin Parrey*, a doctoral candidate at the Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir (Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir-190006, India). His research focuses on the modern development of *maqasid al-shari'ah*. Email: ishfaqamin88@gmail.com
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43. Al-Qur'an, 31:13. "And (mention, O Muhammad), when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, "O my son, do not associate (anything) with Allah. Indeed, association (with Him) is great injustice".
44. Al-Qur'an, 17:44.
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49. Al-Qur'an, 36:81.
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51. Al-Qur'an, 51:56. "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me (*li-ya'budun*)."
52. Al-Qur'an, 02:30.
53. Al-Qur'an, 33:72. "Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man (undertook to) bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant".
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55. Al-Qur'an, 02:172.
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 67. Al-Qur’an, 22:78.
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Narrated (Abu Hurayrah): The Prophet (SAAS) said, “Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So, you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by offering the prayers in the mornings, afternoon and during the last hours of the nights”.
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