



ALL FEATURE

Ummatic Mind as a Weltanschauung in Postmodern Society

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Pursuant to the encouragement of our esteemed rector at the recent Liqa' Jamaie, I reflect on the concept of the *ummah* and its reimagination in the present and future context. In our increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world, the concept of the *ummah*, offers profound insights into addressing some of the most pressing social challenges of today. As we navigate the complexities of postmodern society—marked by among others individualism, consumerism, and globalized capitalism—*ummah* offers a counterbalance, reminding us of collective responsibility and shared humanity. In this reflection I explore in a preliminary way how the *ummatic* mindset may serve as a

worldview or *Weltanschauung* that addresses the social challenges of the present and the future.

The *Ummah*: A Concept Rooted in Solidarity

The term *ummah* has been central in Islamic thought, signifying the idea of a global community bound by shared values, faith, and mutual responsibility. Variations of its uses are found within the Quran, ranging from referring to groups of people to a way of life. Early scholars have defined the *Ummah* in different ways, often focusing on the communal aspects of life and the collective responsibilities of individuals within it.

Ibn Khaldun emphasized the importance of *asabiyyah* (social cohesion) in maintaining a strong and prosperous society. He saw *Ummah* not only as a community united by religious belief but also as a social construct based on solidarity and mutual support. Similarly, Al-Farabi, viewed the *ummah* as a harmonious society where the common good and justice are central, highlighting that each individual's well-being is intimately connected with the well-being of others.

Nu'man bin Bashir (May Allah be pleased with them) reported: Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion and sympathy are just like one body. When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever" (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

These early definitions of the *ummah* focused on the collective well-being, suggesting that no individual is an island and that society thrives when its members cooperate, help one another, and work for the common good. As a sociology academic I believe that this understanding of the *ummah* is particularly relevant today when we consider the challenges humanity faces in an era of neo-liberalism, individualism and postmodern fragmentation.

The Relevance of the *Ummatic* Concept to Addressing Social Challenges

As we confront contemporary challenges like climate change, poverty, genocide and refugee crisis, alienation, and the overwhelming dominance of capitalism and consumerism, the concept of the *ummah* offers a critical lens through which we can reframe these issues. While these issues may seemingly be

separate, they are largely interconnected. As we strive to unite knowledge (*wahdatul 'ilm*), we may discover more comprehensive ways of thinking that will guide us to clarity. The call to return to the *Tawhidic* Epistemology offers a reimagination of solutions towards illumination as mentioned by Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Osman Bakar.

In Surah An-Nur verse 35, Allah revealed: Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp is in a crystal, the crystal is like a shining star, lit from 'the oil of' a blessed olive tree, 'located' neither to the east nor the west, whose oil would almost glow, even without being touched by fire. Light upon light! Allah guides whoever He wills to His light. And Allah sets forth parables for humanity. For Allah has 'perfect' knowledge of all things.

Take, for instance, the issue of climate change. The devastating effects of environmental degradation—such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and biodiversity loss—are a direct consequence of human activities that prioritize short-term profit over long-term sustainability. These challenges are not confined to one country or one group; they affect the global community as a whole. A true *Ummatic* weltanschauung would emphasize shared responsibility for the planet based on the principles of *Tawhid* and the role of the *Khalifah* for *Rahmatan lil alamin*. As such, actions would not only focus on interventions but also in rethinking about the source of the problems.

Similarly, the economic challenges of poverty and inequality can also be further explored and reimagined. According to the World Bank, 44% of the global population—approximately 3.5 billion people—live on less than \$6.85 per day, which is the poverty threshold for upper-middle-income countries. Despite decades of what is presented as development, the total number of people living below this line has remained largely unchanged since 1990. In a world where billions of people live in poverty while a significantly smaller portion of others accumulate vast wealth, the *Ummatic* worldview serves as a powerful reminder of our obligation. The wealth gap we see today is not just an economic issue—it is a social and ethical one.

In the postmodern world, individuality is often prized above all else. The rise of consumer culture, driven by capitalism, has led to

a society where self-interest, competition, and material accumulation are often prioritized over communal well-being or accountability. Postmodernism, in its extreme form, challenges the very idea of collective identities and shared truth, emphasizing the fragmented nature of reality and the deconstruction of established norms.

However, as I highlighted earlier these challenges are interconnected. The current celebration of individualism has resulted in a number of social challenges. Climate change, for instance, is exacerbated by overconsumption and the relentless pursuit of personal comfort, often at the expense of the collective good. Poverty and alienation are similarly linked to systems that prioritize the individual over the community. As individuals are increasingly disconnected from one another and from the larger social fabric, feelings of alienation, depression, and loneliness are on the rise. Ironically, we may think it is a strange outcome in a world of constant connectivity.

A return to and the reimagination of the concept of the *Ummah*, with its emphasis on *Tawhid*, interconnectedness and mutual care, provides a powerful antidote to the isolation, fragmentation, and selfishness that characterize postmodern society. In this vision, the well-being of the individual is tied to the well-being of the community. In the face of overwhelming global issues, the key to overcoming these challenges lies not in the individual but in the guided and illuminated collective—an *Ummah* united in our shared truth and responsibility to care for one another and for the planet in striving towards rahmatan lil alamin.***

(These are the views of Dr. Sh Fatimah AlZahrah Syed Hussien affiliated with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, AHAS KIRKHS AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS KIRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) which do not represent IIUM Today's.)

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