

Are the Muslims victims of Civilizational Narcissism?

Recently, I have read a small Urdu book named "Tehzebi Nargasiat" which stands for "Civilizational Narcissism". The booklet is written by Mubarak Haider who has composed a unique idea into a small scholarly booklet. Although, the author is known for his orientation to the Socialist Left but this book is a marvelous masterpiece of unbiased psychoanalysis.

This article aims to add more information for the readers on the subject. We will also draw the attention of the author and the readers to a few important points of the above-mentioned book which need revision.

What is Narcissism?

As mentioned by the author, "Narcissism" refers to egotism, selfishness and self-centeredness of a person. It is simply lack of consideration of others. It is a personality disorder.

The name "narcissism" is derived from the Greek mythology. Narcissus was a handsome Greek youth who had never seen his reflection, but because of a prediction by an Oracle, looked in a pool of water and saw his reflection for the first time. He fell into love of his reflection. Unable to consummate his love, Narcissus pined away at the pool and changed into the flower that bears his name, the narcissus.

Every person is a narcissist up to some extent but when this self-love crosses the line of reasonableness and becomes out of proportion, he/she becomes mentally sick. An egocentric person is infatuated and obsessed by his/her own personality that he/she ignores everyone else.

Symptoms of Narcissism

Some symptoms of narcissism are as follows:

1. A narcissist feels grandiose and self-important. He exaggerates his achievements and talents to the point of lying. He also demands to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements.

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2. He is obsessed with fantasies of unlimited success, fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled brilliance, bodily beauty, sexual performance or ideal, everlasting, all-conquering love or passion.
3. The egoist is firmly convinced that he is unique and, being special, can only be understood by and associated with, other special or unique, or high-status people. He requires excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation.
4. He feels himself entitled to unreasonable or special and favorable priority treatment. He demands automatic and full compliance with his or her expectations. He cracks the whip to make sure that others are at his beck and call.
5. Narcissists are "interpersonally exploitative". They use others to achieve their own ends. They are devoid of empathy. They are unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge the feelings and needs of others. Due to this reason, they are more interested in speaking rather than listening. They are happy to hear their admiration only. They may have an iron fist in a velvet glove.
6. A self-centered person is constantly envious of others or believes that they feel the same about him. He laughs up his sleeves on other's weaknesses.
7. He is as arrogant as a peacock. He expresses haughty behaviors or attitudes coupled with rage when frustrated, contradicted, or confronted. *(Point No. 1 to 7 are adapted from: www.healthyplace.com)*
8. Criticizing him is like a red flag to a bull. He hits back like a bear with sorehead and foams at the mouth. If he is unable to blow his top, he goes into pieces and starts groaning inwardly.
9. When the attention of a common man is drawn towards some of his mistake, he acknowledges it. On the contrary, the narcissist feels it important to lash the criticizer out. He transfers the responsibility of his own mistakes to others. Even if he accepts some of his mistake, he does so for the sake of admiration to be an altruist.
10. Narcissists never acknowledge that they are egocentric. If someone draws their attention to it, they reject the facts and attack on the reliability of the appraiser by picking holes in his personality.

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11. Refined narcissists portray themselves in a presentable and tasteful manner while unpolished ones often make an ass of themselves.
12. They make rules for others but are not interested in following such rules.
13. The egoist is an extremely manipulative boss or a mentally-bruised flattering servant.

Narcissism is not limited to individuals. Groups, tribes, societies and nations are often victimized by it in different stages of their life cycle. It happens when they start feeling proud of themselves beyond the normal limits. Although, individuals in that society may be normal in their personal capacity but they may be narcissists at collective level.

Are the Contemporary Muslims Narcissists?

The author has performed psychoanalysis of the Muslims of present-day in the light of above-mentioned attributes to determine whether they are victims of narcissism.

I find no other choice except to admit that large numbers of our people are swindled by enormous amount of self-pride and self-love. This is not limited to our egocentric attitude to the people of other religions but we are so swellheaded in even sectarian issues. We look at the people of other sects with disdain. I disagree with the author on the point that all the Muslims are narcissists. There is a significant number of Muslims who are normal.

The author has focused his work to the modern-day wars among Muslims and others. In my opinion, the scope of this work should be extended from wars to all of our interactions with the people of other religions. We should also take into account the relations of the sects within Muslims. Let us analyze our behavior in light of above mentioned personality traits.

Self Importance

It is true that we feel ourselves important in this world. This self-important is usually derived from a verse of the Quran:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ. (آل عمران 3:110)

You are the best of peoples, evolved for humankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah.

We took the verse as we are granted the title of "the Best People" in the world. We have ignored the fact that the communication is directed towards the companions of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم who were the direct audience of the Quran. They were given this title due to certain traits which are prescribed in the context of this verse.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ (102)

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ (103)

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ (104)

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ (105)

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكْفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ (106)

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ أبيضَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ ففِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ (107)

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ تَنْزِلُهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا لِلْعَالَمِينَ (108)

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ (109)

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ (110)

O believers! Fear God as He should be feared. And die not except in a state of submission (to God).

Hold fast, altogether, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you) and be not divided among yourself. Remember with gratitude Allah's favor upon you; as you were enemies

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and He joined your hearts in love. So that by His Grace, you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of the Hellfire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah does make His Signs clear to you, that you may be guided.

Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity.

Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving the clear signs: For them is a dreadful penalty on the Day when some faces will be (lit up with) white, and some faces will be (in the gloom of) black. To those whose faces will be black, (will be said): "Did you reject the faith after accepting it? Taste then the penalty for rejecting Faith."

But those whose faces will be (lit with) white, they will be in (the light of) God's mercy: therein to dwell (for ever).

These are the Signs of Allah: We rehearse them to you in Truth: And God means no injustice to any of His creatures.

To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: To Him do all questions go back (for decision).

You are the best of peoples, evolved for humankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them: among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors. (Translation derived from that of Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

The title of "The Best People" was given to the companions *رضى الله عنهم* of the Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه* *وآله وسلم* because they accomplished the criteria mentioned in the context of this verse.

They were God-fearing people who were humbly submitted to God (i.e. the literal meaning of the word 'Muslim'). They were united through the rope of Allah. They used to invite the humanity for admirable values like justice, honesty, compassion, benevolence and fear of God. They used to forbid from evils like malevolence, hatred, corruption and arrogance.

Instead of following into their footsteps, we exaggerate ourselves that we inherit their achievements by default. We demand to be recognized as superior due to our ancestors

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regardless of our own character. To see examples, just read through the literature of our Muslim nationalists who make a song and dance about the achievements of our ancestors.

It is not true that all of us are much of a muchness. There are many people among us who go with the flow but some of us still adhere to the practice of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

Attitude with Others

We assume ourselves to be unique and special. We require admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation from the people of other religions but are unwilling to pay heed to their concerns. If other people do not fulfill any of our demand, we look daggers at them.

We expect others to be fully compliant to our values and religion but we never respect their values and religions. Instead of convincing them positively to adopt the right path, we vent our spleen in form of terrorist attacks, protests, demonstrations and denunciations.

Every cloud has a silver lining. Despite of such extremism, we do have many reasonable people who spread the message of Islam in a decent and positive way.

Exploitation & Double Standards

Although some of our narcissists are "interpersonally exploitative" but thanks to God, majority of us does not belong to this category. We don't use others to achieve our own ends. We have large numbers of people who are full of empathy.

If we evaluate our relations with other nations, the above-mentioned statement is true but we have plenty of people who are abusive to their compatriots. Examples of such exploitative people can be found in our brutal feudal lords to deceitful traders and from corrupt politicians to debased religious leaders who are like a wolf in sheep's clothing.

We have some extremists who have double standards. They are on cloud nine when innocent people of other countries are victimized by terrorists but any attack on us from their side makes their blood boil. They bark at the wrong tree and break every rule in the book to achieve their malicious objectives.

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We condemn modern superpowers for their exploitation and attacks but we never denounced the Muslim invaders who raided other countries in search of new lands and booties.

It is important to note that the wars of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ were not aimed to get land or booties. The objective of such wars was to pull the plug of religious persecution. The governments of that time were not willing to allow members of other sects and religions to live freely in their lands.

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ.
(البقرة 2:193)

And fight them on until there is no more persecution, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah. But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.

In later centuries, the main objective of Jihad i.e. the end of pogrom disappeared into thin air and it was replaced by the wars in search of economic resources. Unfortunately, such knavish rulers became our ideals.

If we look at the bright side, the number of such people is limited among us. Majority of us condemns attacks on civilians regardless of their location.

Arrogance & Self-Criticism

We do have enough humble people but we are not devoid of arrogant ones. Such people may be humble in their individual capacity but they are extremely arrogant at national level. Examples of our haughty behaviors are common in our literature fulminating other religions and sects. Such literature is usually full of rage and wrath against others.

We have some people who are not aware of self-criticism. They are up in arms if some one draws their attention to their weaknesses. They are keen in shifting the responsibility of their blunders to the shoulders of others in form of conspiracy theories. They assume that all of our troubles are perpetrated by the hidden schemes of others. They ignore the fact that success of any conspiracy is dependent upon our internal vulnerabilities. If we overcome our weaknesses, we can give a tough time to the connivers.

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Thanks to God, number of such narcissists is limited. Despite of that, we do have a rich history of self-criticism and reform. It is God's special blessing upon us that He raises people in all ages who point the finger at the evil ideologies and practices permeated through our societies. Although such venerable persons get flak from their contemporaries but our later generations admire their contributions.

If we peep through the history, From U'mar Ibn A'bdul Aziz to Ahmed Ibn Hanbal and from Ibn Taimiyah to Shah Waliullah, we find that people came down to them like a ton of bricks but they stood their grounds.

Despite of such indomitable personalities, we find a lot of people who don't like self-analysis.

Impact of Narcissism

Narcissism is a psychological disorder. It ruins not only the personality of its victim but it also creates a lot of problems for the people connected to him. A large number of our people especially the religious ones suffer from narcissism. It has a direct impact on their personalities and the people associated with them.

The biggest adverse impact is on the dissemination of the message of Islam. According to the verse mentioned above, we are held responsible to deliver the message of God to humanity. If we fail to do so, we do not deserve the title of "*The best of peoples*". Our egocentric approach is the main hurdle to spread the true message of God.

Contrary to our belief, other nations do not perceive Islam as "The Message of God". They assume Islam as "The Religion of Arrogant Narcissists" who are determined to destroy the world. The only reason for that is our attitude towards them. How could we expect that they will pay heed to the peaceful message of Islam after we go to great lengths to develop such a mindset?

We get on our high horse when the Western Media publishes reports on massive conversion of people to Islam in Europe and America but we ignore the fact that we have done everything to make the message of Islam a dead loss. We are unaware of the fact that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones to others.

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Imagine that a chesty propagator of some other religion comes to us and threatens us to accept his views otherwise he will annihilate us. Contrast this example with a humble disseminator of his views. To whom would we like to listen? The former one or the later one? Unfortunately, our image is that of the former one to others. The main reason behind our behavior is the heedlessness of a narcissist.

In addition to this negative impact on the message of Islam, narcissism is also hollowing our societies out. Contemporary terrorism is nothing more than a stark manifestation of such egocentrism. This self-centeredness is caving in our countries to the extent that a total collapse is heading towards us in leaps and bounds. We are at the point of make or break ourselves.

This narcissism is leading us to the state of nihilism. Our ethical values are being degenerated. People are willing to sell their souls for money. Such decadence has little impact on our so-called enemies but it is leading us to an unmitigated disaster.

How to get rid of Narcissism?

Getting a good riddance of narcissism is not an easy job. In order to break the back of the beast, a long struggle is required involving blood, sweat and tears to pull the plug of this self-centeredness.

As discussed earlier, narcissists never recognize that they are victimized by this disorder. Al-Hamdulillah, all of us are not swindled by this ailment. It is the responsibility of those who are free of it to help others in this regard. First of all, we have to eat humble pie to admit that we are narcissists as a whole.

In next step, we have to stab at the root of narcissism. I've personally experienced that the foundations of narcissism are deep-rooted in our educational system. By educational system, I do not mean the system of conventional educational institutes only. Any educational system comprises of both formal and informal channels.

Narcissism is not only part of the curriculum taught at our religious and secular schools but it is also widespread in the realm of informal education. In cradle, a mother tells her little child that we are the descendents of the great heroes of the world and it is the responsibility of other nations to be subdued to us. Thousands of sermons, debates, talk shows and lectures reaffirm such narcissism.

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Some eager beavers suggest a complete restructuring of our educational system but it is not practical. Some other enthusiasts propose a complete ban on the schools which infiltrate narcissism in the next generations. Such so-called solutions produce nothing more than a counter reaction.

There is no short-term solution to this problem. We need the religious schools to teach the religion to our children. Complete abolition of something deeply-rooted in our societies is not possible. Moreover, the people in our religious and secular educational establishment are not willing to change themselves.

If we want to move up in the world, we have to find some feasible solution. Illumination is the simple solution of darkness. A single lamp is enough to obliterate darkness at least at a small place. Let us start from the point from where we are. If we are sincere to ourselves, we should light up a lamp of positive thinking.

Let's think big. We can start exploring all avenues to establish an informal or formal educational system, which is based on constructive thinking and free of narcissism.

If you can establish an educational institute whose core value is love of humanity instead of hatred, go into overdrive for that. If you can start a religious study circle free of narcissism, sink your teeth in it. If you are able to convey your message by writing, start writing. If you cannot do anything, you can still start developing a positive attitude in your family members that is free of Civilizational Narcissism.

If you lack funds to launch an expensive setup, do it over the internet or email. Developments of information technology have made it as easy as pie for us to spread the message of Islam which is the message of love and respect to humanity.

We have to hitch our wagon to a star in order to disseminate the message of humbleness, love, concern and care of others. We can see a light at the end of the tunnel. We should not come apart at the seams for the length of this journey. A journey of 1000 miles starts with a single step.

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*Everything is based on mind, is led by mind, is fashioned by mind. If you speak and act with a polluted mind, suffering will follow you, as the wheels of the oxcart follow the footsteps of the ox. Everything is based on mind, is led by mind, is fashioned by mind. If you speak and act with a pure mind, happiness will follow you, as a shadow clings to a form. **Buddha***

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Share your views. If you any question regarding personality development, send an email to mubashirnazir100@gmail.com.

Think about it!

- Evaluate your own personality for narcissism in the light of above-mentioned attributes.
- What are the reasons for our narcissism? Identify three reasons and three solutions to our narcissism.

Send your comments and questions by email to publish them on this webpage.