

“Clash of Civilizations”

6:30 pm – 8:00 pm: 23 December, 2011

**HUL Lecture Theatre, Level 2, Academic Centre, Indian School of Business,
Gachibowli, Hyderabad**



The idea of a clash of civilizations was popularized in mainstream political discourse by the renowned political thinker Samuel Huntington. This concept was further analyzed at a public session jointly organized by Aspen Institute India and the Indian School of Business.

Professor Akeel Bilgrami, Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy, Columbia University, USA, the keynote speaker for this session, emphasized the importance of understanding the idea of clash of civilizations. He further observed that Islamic countries whether in the Middle East or in South Asia have always been geo-politically important as well as a rich source of natural resources. Thus, there has been a robust interest and interference of western powers in Islamic countries and historically as well, there has been a sustained hostility between Christianity of the west and Islam of the Muslim nations.

Upon linking the idea of clash of civilizations with religious identity and identity politics, it is seen that such identities can also be formed under conditions of triumph. An instance of

identity as a form of triumphism is seen in the case of emergence of Zionism and Jewish ideology after the founding of the Israeli state.

Specific acts of extremism and terrorism have also contributed towards the idea of a clash. Further, when there is a prevalent sense of defeat and vulnerability amongst the people, the ground is set for the rise of terrorism, establishment of stricter forms of Islamic society etc. The policy of racist immigration policies followed in European countries highlights this sense of defeat and vulnerability. Thus, a clash is a spinoff of this factor.

Professor Bilgrami examined the concept of clash in the context of India by first undertaking a historical analysis of the nation building exercise that took place in the late 17th century Europe. Post-Westphalia, a new kind of justification and legitimacy was provided for the nation state entity by creating a feeling of solidarity for the state. None of this nation building took place in India. It was only in the 20th century that the first suggestion towards such form of nation building was given by V D Savarkar. Gandhi on the other hand, anxiously rejected the European form of nation building because such a form eventually led to the discourse of majorities vs. minorities. Moreover, Indian society had always been remarkably pluralistic and tolerant and therefore a clash type of animosity was non-existent. It only came into existence in the 20th century coinciding with the nation building exercise being initiated in India.

Another useful aspect for examining the concept of clash is to look at the 17th century European notion of civility that belonged to the monarchy and propertied elite vs. the notion of cruelty that resided with the brute public masses. This dichotomy was deliberately created to perpetuate the control of the ruling class. It is interesting to note that the notion of civility vs. cruelty dichotomy carries forward into the modern day notion of rights (granting of rights vs. denial of rights) and eventually to the concept of clash of civilizations.

During the Q and A round, Professor Bilgrami answered that the potential areas of a future clash would be in the arenas of market discipline, international finance capital and the technology corporate sector. For any proper analysis of a clash in International Relations, it is essential to look at the basic, deep rooted and complex structures that determine war and conflict.

The session was chaired by Mr. Ajay Gandhi, Founder Trustee, Manthan Foundation and Managing Director of Wings Infonet Ltd. Other speakers included Mr. Vishal Vashisht, Managing Director, SONG Investment Advisors and Mr. Kumara Guru, Assistant Director – Dean's Office, Indian School of Business.

To know more about this session, click on the video link

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxy0kJLGdjs&list=UUlvdd1ncT8Z9OtE6gEXc8HQ&index=1&feature=plcp>