ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN NATURE: IBN ‘ĀSHŪR’S FITRAH-BASED THEORY OF MAQĀŠID AL-SHARĪ‘AH

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Abstract: The concept of human nature is central to both Islamic and Western thought, as manifested in the rich legacy of literature on human psychology in both intellectual traditions. A comprehensive account of human nature (or fitrah) from an Islamic perspective, can be gleaned from the Qur’ān, Prophetic narrations and works of Muslim scholars like al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and al-Rāzī. The famous Zaytūna Imām, Tāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr (d.1973), in his book on the objectives of Islamic Law, *Maqāsid al–Sharī‘ah al-Islāmiyyah*, provides a fitrah-based model for building human civilisation, thereby linking Islamic law to psychology. The present paper is a humble attempt to study the views of Ibn ‘Āshūr on human nature and to highlight the relevance of Islamic perspectives on the ‘human being’ with regards to civilisational development.

Keywords: Fitrah, Maqasid al-Shari‘ah, Disposition, Civilisation

Defining Fitrah

The word *fitrah* comes from the Arabic root word *fitr*, the verbal noun being *faṭrun*. The root action means “he clove, split, slit, rent or cracked it.” The first form *faṭarahu* means “he created it”, that is, he caused it to exist, newly, for the first time. Thus, “*faṭiru‘s-samāwāt*” means the “Originator or Creator of the heavens.” The concept of creation in the Qur’ānic language is more precise than the use of the term ‘creation’ in English. In contrast to the general English usage of ‘creation’, the word ‘*faṭara*’ means “to originate (something for the first time)”, an action only Allah can perform. Thus, *faṭara* can only refer to Allah originating something. It is in this very connection that the title of Surah 35 of the Qur’ān is *Al-Fāṭir* (The Originator). The overriding theme of the entire surah is calling upon people to observe the natural creation around them in order to discern that Allah ‘originated’ it and has absolute knowledge of it in all aspects. *Fitrah* means “the genesis of creation, the original unadulterated nature of things, natural disposition.” Bewley has defined *fitrah* as “the first nature, the natural, primordial condition of mankind in harmony with nature.” A. W. Hamid expands this definition in these words:
According to the Quranic or Islamic worldview, the human being—man and woman—is created by God in a naturally good and pure state, free from sin. This is called the state of *fiṭrah*. A baby at birth is totally innocent. He does not bear the sin or guilt of his parents or his ancestors. He starts off with a clean slate.⁵

**Fiṭrah in Qur’ān and Ḥadīth**

The word *fiṭrah* occurs only once in the Qur’ān (30:30). However, its related words (derived from the same root *faṭara*), occur nineteen times in five other forms like *faṭṭara*, *fāṭir*, *infaṭara*, etc.⁶ The translation of the verse bearing the term ‘*fiṭrah*’ goes as:

> So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: (establish) God’s handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by God; that is the standard religion: but most mankind understand not.⁷

Muhammad Asad has translated the same verse as follows:

> AND SO, set thy face steadfastly towards the [one ever-true] faith, turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition which God has instilled into man: [for,] not to allow any change to corrupt what God has thus created-this is the [purpose of the one] ever-true faith; but most people know it not.⁸

The term *fitrah* in the above verse has been variously interpreted by Qur’ānic exegetes (*mufassirūn*), from al-Ṭabarῑ to the Qur’ān commentators of present times. For al-Ṭabarῑ, *fitrah* corresponds to the model (*ṣun’ah*) upon which God fashioned human beings.⁹ Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, in his *Al-Mufradāt fῑ Gharῑb al-Qur’ān*, defines *fitrah* as knowledge implanted and ingrained by God in human beings, the knowledge that is evoked when even those who reject Islam accept God as their Creator.¹⁰ For al-Zamakhsharī, the famous Mu‘tazilī Qur’anic exegete, *fitrah* is the potential in human beings to accept the Oneness of God. Althought it is that which rational inquiry leads to, and is innately ingrained in man, it does not in itself yield knowledge of God. Rather, it works in harmony with the rational faculty of human beings and owes the validation of its findings to rational inquiry.¹¹ Al-Rāzī, the leading Ash‘arite theologian and commentator on the Holy Qur’ān, interprets *fitrah* as the knowledge of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) strongly engrained in human beings, and their natural involuntary servitude to the Creator which is not sufficient (unless it is realised voluntarily).¹² Moudūdī, the famous twentieth-century South Asian revivalist thinker, is of the opinion that all human beings have been created with the *fitrah* of monotheism and it goes against
their *fitrah* to remain either indifferent towards the Creator or associate partners with Him.\textsuperscript{13} Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥῑ, another notable Qur’anic exegete from the South Asian subcontinent and a contemporary of Moudūḏī, in his voluminous thematic commentary of the Qur’ān entitled *Tadabbur i Qur’ān* (in Urdu), interprets *fitrah* in the above verse in relation to the preceding words *fa aqim wajhak li al-dīn ḥanīfan* (keep yourselves focused on the upright religion). For him, the *fitrah* upon which Allah has created human beings is the upright religion. The religion which human beings are called upon to follow is not something extraneous; rather, it is ingrained in them. The duty of Prophets is but to remind human beings about this inherent knowledge and guide them to behave themselves according to their sound nature (*fitrah sālimah*). That is why the Qur’ān designates itself by names like *dhikr*, *dhikrā*, *tadhkirah*, etc. all of which translate to a reminder or admonition regarding what is already there but has been forgotten. In the same vein of argumentation, Iṣlāḥῑ criticises those philosophers who uphold the *tabula rasa* view of human nature and consider human personality merely a product of experience.\textsuperscript{14}

What is noteworthy in Asad’s translation is his rendition of the word ‘*fitrah*’ as ‘nature.’ He elaborated this in the footnote to the above verse, regarding it as the human ability to distinguish between right and wrong. He says: “The term *fitrah*, rendered by me as “natural disposition”, connotes in this context man’s inborn, intuitive ability to discern between right and wrong, true and false, and, thus, to sense God’s existence and oneness.”\textsuperscript{15}

The word *fitrah* has been considered to mean Islam itself. The above verse makes mention of the term *dīn* (asking the believers to remain steadfast in it) followed by the word ‘*fitrah*’, which can be regarded as the substitute of *dīn*. Thus, in the light of the above verse, Islam is considered to be *dīn al-fitrah*, i.e. the religion harmonious with human nature. This is further supported by a Prophetic narration whose translation reads as:

“There is not a newborn child who is not born in a state of *fitrah*. His parents then make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian, just as an animal is born intact. Do you observe any among them that are maimed (at birth)?”\textsuperscript{16}

Although the Qur’ān mentions the word *fitrah* only once, it discusses the characteristics of human nature, both positive and negative, in a number of places. It mentions that human beings have been honoured by the Creator (17:70), have been created in the best of configurations (95:04), are the vicegerent of the Creator on earth (02:30), have been bestowed with intellect to understand and manipulate nature for their survival and progress (2:29,187), have been privileged with the spiritual element along with their material existence (38:71,72), and can invoke their Creator directly without the mediation of anyone (2:186). All these constitute
the positive characteristics of the human personality and establish his unique place in the cosmos. Likewise, the Qur’an also highlights the limitations of human nature—hastiness (17:11; 21:37), greed (59:09), fragility (04:28), ungratefulness (17:67), tyranny (96:6-8), fearfulness (70:19-25), etc. The prophetic narrations also reflect the same picture of human nature. The Prophet is reported to have regarded actions like trimming of moustaches, using a toothbrush (miswāk), shortening of nails, circumcision, etc. as due to fitrah.\(^{17}\)

The Muslim scholars have pondered over the Qur’anic and Prophetic account of human nature, and through a serious reflection and contemplation, provided priceless insights on the subject. They uphold three different views regarding fitrah (the primordial human nature). These are:\(^{18}\)

i. The view that fitrah is a state of intrinsic goodness and intrinsic evil. This view is defended by Sayyid Qutb.\(^{19}\) It represents a dualistic view of human nature. It is substantiated by an interpretation of the following Quranic verses:

\[
\text{By the soul and Him Who proportioned it, and inspired it with its impurity and purity, surely blissful is he who has cleansed his soul, and miserable is he who has buried it}^{20}\text{ (Q, 91:7-10).}
\]

\[
\text{And recall what time thy Lord said unto the angels: verily I am about to create a man from ringing clay of loam moulded. Then when I have formed him and breathed into him of My Spirit fall down unto him prostrate (Q, 15:28-29).}
\]

The dualistic view of human nature as developed by Sayyid Qutb is grounded on the belief that God created human beings with a duality of nature and ability. To elaborate, this duality refers to the two constituents that make up man: clay and God’s spirit. These result in two equal tendencies, to good and evil, to abide by Divine direction or to go astray. Human beings are able to discern good and evil in all that they encounter and are equally capable of following either. External factors only help humans to awaken the inner potential that dictates their chosen path.\(^{21}\)

The following verses also substantiates this viewpoint regarding human nature:

\[
\text{And (have we not) shown to him the two highways? (Q, 90:10)}
\]

\[
\text{Verily We! We showed him the way; then he becometh either thankful or ingrate. (Q, 75:03)}
\]

Besides innate ability, human beings are endowed with a conscious
faculty to determine their actions, thereby making them responsible for the same. Those who use this faculty to strengthen the drive of good and suppress evil are prosperous while those who do otherwise are at loss. Since they are free to choose between the two, human beings stand responsible for their actions.\textsuperscript{23}

The Creator of the Universe established man on this earth as His representative, His deputy (\textit{khalīfah}). He endowed man with the capacity to know and to judge. Man has been given the powers of thinking, understanding, and the ability to distinguish between good and evil. He has been granted the faculty to discern, distinguish, and the freedom to choose for himself. He enjoys a kind of autonomy – a free will to use his latent power in the exercise of his moral judgment. While investing man with this faculty and conferring on him the responsibility of acting as His representative, God made clear to him that He alone was the Master and the Sovereign and that He alone merited man’s worship, adoration, and obedience.\textsuperscript{24}

ii. The view that \textit{fitrah} is a state of neither goodness nor evil. This view is accepted by Abu Umar ibn Abd al-Barr\textsuperscript{25} and represents a neutral view of human nature. He argues that the heart of a newborn baby is like the sound newborn animal with all its organs intact. As unmaimed bodies are maimed only after birth, the sound hearts of newborn babies are devoid of both belief and disbelief, attaining either of these only after a certain maturity.\textsuperscript{26} Their final destiny, Paradise or Hell, cannot be determined at birth as they are accountable for their deeds only after attaining maturity. Besides, it is impossible for a child to have any sense of belief (or disbelief) as he is not able to understand anything. The following verse is put forward to substantiate this view of human nature:

\begin{quote}
\textit{And Allah hath brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while ye know not aught, and He hath appointed for you hearing and sight and hearts that hopefully ye might give thanks} (Q, 16:78).
\end{quote}

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr interprets this verse to mean that he who does not know anything is not in a position to have belief (\textit{īmān}) or disbelief (\textit{kufr}). He claims this is the most authentic meaning of the word ‘\textit{fitrah}’.\textsuperscript{27} To further strengthen his viewpoint, he takes support from the following verses:

\begin{quote}
\textit{And ye shall be requited not except for that which ye have been doing} (Q,37: 39).
\textit{Every soul will be a pledge for that which it hath earned} (Q, 74:38).
\end{quote}
Whosoever is guided, it is only for himself that he is guided and whosoever straith, it is only against the same that he straith; and a burden-bearer beareth not the burden of another. And We have not been tormentors until We had raised an apostle (Q, 17:15).

The above verses relate the notions of reward, punishment, and responsibility with one’s knowledge and striving only as a mature adult. Therefore, fitrah cannot be taken to mean Islam and īmān as these include declaration by the tongue, belief in the heart and actions with the limbs, all of which could not be performed by a child.28

To contrast the above two viewpoints, it can be argued that while the dualistic view rests on the inclination of humans towards both good and evil, the neutral view focuses itself on their potential for the same. To elaborate, the dualistic view implies that the motivation of humans for good and evil is fundamentally rooted in their innate tendencies for good and evil, while the neutral view of fitrah regards it as an outcome of mere environmental influence. From the dualistic perspective, social environment plays the role of strengthening the tendency for good and subordinating that of evil, while with respect to the neutral view of environment awaken man’s potential for good. The righteous man in accordance with the dualistic view acts righteously owing to a conscience rooted in the good aspect of his nature and strengthened by the environment. On the other hand, from the neutral perspective, righteousness is attributed to a conscience learned and acquired purely from the social environment. Likewise, for the former viewpoint learning good and evil is the outcome of the innate tendencies for good and evil inherent in human nature, while the latter viewpoint maintains that it is not the outcome of any inherent inclination but purely the result of the social environment to which the child is exposed. From both viewpoints, the ethical responsibility of humans, reward, and punishment are reliable only after the attainment of maturity.29 The proponents of these two viewpoints seek to interpret fitrah in the light of free will and responsibility.

iii. The view that fitrah is a state of intrinsic goodness. This view is defended by Ibn Taymiyyah30 and many others. It represents a positive view of human nature. This is the most popular view amongst classical scholars and is the traditionally accepted view.31

This ‘intrinsic goodness’ is interpreted in two ways, representing two authentic interpretations of fitrah. One interpretation is that fitrah means Islam. In other words, every child is born with a natural inclination towards Islam.
Everybody is a potential Muslim by nature and remains so provided there are no environmental differences. The other interpretation takes \textit{fitrah} to be one’s readiness for Islam, that one is born with an innate ability to recognise one’s Creator, acknowledge Him, and submit to His commandments. This faculty has been termed by I. R. Faroqui as ‘\textit{senus numinis}’ which enables man to “acknowledge God as God, and recognise His commandments as norms or ought-to-be’s of all that is.”\textsuperscript{32} The second view of \textit{fitrah}, i.e. readiness for Islam, can be found in the works of Mufti Mohammad Shafi who argues that \textit{fitrah} can co-exist with disbelief and therefore cannot be equated with Islam as such. A child who has been brought up in disbelief nevertheless retains the ability to revert to Islam. Despite his disbelief (or later change in his belief), his \textit{fitrah} is intact and his preparedness for Islam has not changed.\textsuperscript{33} Shafi also maintains that the majority of scholars who interpret \textit{fitrah} as Islam actually intend to convey a preparedness or readiness for Islam.\textsuperscript{34} This view of the intrinsic goodness of human nature has the merit of being in consonance with the Qur’\textsuperscript{ānic statement that the “creation of God does not change” (Q, 30:30). For Ibn Taymiyyah, \textit{fitrah}, rather than meaning Islam per se, is the purity of the heart and its willingness to accept the truth, such that if it were left to itself and not corrupted, it would have no other path except that of Islam.\textsuperscript{35}

Although each of the three viewpoints presented here have convincing arguments in their favour, the weight lies more towards the third one, the positive view of human nature, as this is in consonance with all the textual evidences. Besides, it accounts for the rational faculty of human beings, their moral sense, as well as the issue of free will and predestination in a convincingly holistic way. The text of the hadith mentioned earlier testifies to the fact that \textit{fitrah} is a state of intrinsic goodness. Moreover, the Prophet mentioned that the parents of a child make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian, but not a Muslim. If \textit{fitrah} was not in tandem with Islam then this exclusion would not have been in this hadith. Thus, one may genuinely argue that a child is born in harmony with Islam. It is noteworthy that the word Islam is here being used in the widest sense and encompasses the message of the Prophets before Muhammad. Further, the deviations from \textit{fitrah} have been compared with the maiming of animals, illustrating that the natural state is good while deviation from it is bad and worth condemning. It can also be concluded from this hadith that good constitutes the inner state of a person whereas evil is something that comes into play after the birth of a human being due to the corruption caused by his parents, who constitute the most significant determining factor of one’s personality. The verses of the Holy Qur’\textsuperscript{ān, 91: 7-10; mentioned earlier in favour of the dualistic view, argue that human beings are
equally disposed to both good and evil. This is interpreted from the positive viewpoint to mean that human beings have been made cognizant of both good and evil. Again, it is in the context of an optimistic account of human nature that all legal systems and the disciplinary or reformative actions aimed at the amelioration of the human condition can be justified or made sense of.

It is not possible to explain the above viewpoints on *fitrah* in more detail keeping in view the scope and limitations of this paper. The main focus of this paper is on the views of Ṭāhir ibn ‘Āshūr regarding *fitrah* which are discussed below.

Ibn ‘Āshūr on *Fitrah*: Grounding the Objectives of Islamic Law (*Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah*) in Human Nature

Muhammad Ṭāhir ibn ‘Āshūr (d.1973), the famous Zaytūna Imām, was an eminent Muslim reformist, best known for his voluminous Qur’ānic exegesis, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanvīr*, as well as his Treatise on *Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah*. He has linked the higher objectives of Islamic law with human nature. Therefore, before discussing his views on *fitrah*, it is suitable to make a brief mention of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*.

According to the Qur’ān, Allah has not created anything in the heavens and the earth in vain. The purpose behind the creation of the universe and everything therein is to serve humankind. But humankind itself, in Qur’ānic terms, has been created to serve God. The divinely revealed Qur’ān and its Prophetic explanation are meant to teach humankind how to serve God in the best possible way. As God is absolutely independent and not in need of anything, service to Him is meant to ultimately realise the welfare of mankind herein and hereafter. That is why the Qur’ānic verses and Prophetic narrations are replete with the rationale and wisdom behind the divine rulings prescribed for the benefit of humankind. Moreover, a thoughtful analysis of the overall body of Islamic rulings makes it manifest that Islam is meant to realise higher objectives, goals and purposes, to translate the welfare of humankind into reality. These higher objectives, purposes, and intents behind the Islamic rulings are represented by the term *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* in the Islamic legal discourse.

The term ‘*maqṣid*’ (plural: *maqāṣid*) refers to a purpose, objective, principle, intent, goal, end.36 *Maqāṣid* of the Islamic law are the objectives behind the Islamic rulings. According to Auda, *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* “is a system of values that could contribute to a desired and sound application of the *Shari‘a*.”37 This concept has been employed as a legal hermeneutical tool in premodern Islamic law (or legal theory, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, to be more precise) at least since the third century Hijri.38 It is based on the idea that Islamic law is purposive in nature, it serves particular purposes (e.g., promoting people’s benefit and welfare and protecting
them from harm) that are either explicitly present in or can be derived from the fountainheads of the sources of Islamic law, namely the Qur’an and Sunna. *Mqaṣīd al-sharī‘ah* is also an umbrella term that includes many other concepts that have been closely linked to it in Islamic jurisprudence, most notably the idea of public interests (*al-masaliḥ al-āmmah*) and unrestricted interests (*al-masaliḥ al mursalah*), as well as other principles such as juristic preference (*istiḥsān*), presumption of continuity (*istiṣḥāb*), and avoidance of mischief (*mafṣada*), all of which are considered to be directives in accordance with God’s Will.

While discussing *fitrah*, Ibn ‘Āshūr draws upon a quotation from the famous Muslim philosopher, Ibn Sīnā, from his *Kitāb al-Najat*. Ibn Sīnā says:

> *Fitrah* can be understood in this way that one imagines himself coming into the world being equipped with intellect and maturity but without any prior exposure to society, its realities and customs. He perceives concrete realities and develops ideas about them. Then, he confronts something regarding which he becomes doubtful—if doubt is possible for him—his innate understanding will not affirm it. On the other hand, if doubt is not possible for him, his *fitrah* must necessarily affirm it. However, not everything affirmed by *fitrah* is true; what is true is the nature of the capacity termed as ‘*aql* (intellect), and the nature of the mind sometimes proves to be false mostly in case of abstractions.

Ibn ‘Āshūr links *maqāṣid* with this concept of *fitrah*, quotes the Qur’ānic verse discussed earlier (30:30), and concludes that both Shari‘ah and its *maqāṣid* are in harmony with *fitrah*. For Ibn ‘Āshūr, *fitrah* also refers to the natural disposition (*khilqah*) and the natural order (*nizām*) that God has instilled in every created being. Thus, the *fitrah* of human beings is the inward (*baṭin*) and outward (*ẓāhir*) condition in which human beings have been created, that is, in both intellect and body. Thus, walking on one’s feet is an aspect of humanity’s physical disposition (*fitrah jasadiyyah*), whereas attempting to hold things with one’s feet is incongruous with that nature. Similarly, relating effects to their causes and drawing conclusions from their proper premises are part of a human being’s intellectual and mental disposition (*fitrah ‘aqaliyyah*), whereas drawing conclusions from causes that are not real—known in the science of reasoning as invalidity of argument (*fasād al-waḍ’*)—contradicts that intellectual disposition.

Ibn ‘Āshūr writes:

> The description of Islam as the *fitrah* means that it is congruent with man’s natural disposition, since Islam consists of beliefs (*‘aqā‘id*) and legislations (*tashri‘āt*) that are all rational matters or matters that accord with what is perceived and confirmed by reason.
Ibn ʿĀshūr refers to the laws of Hammurabi, of ancient Egypt, Moses, Zoroaster, as well as ancient India, but adds that none had sufficient universality to transcend their geographic and socio-cultural confines. Islam on the other hand emerged in an era and setting that had preserved its simplicity in isolation from the major civilisational spheres of the ancient world. Although Islam emerged in an Arabian setting, it never confined its outlook to that context. As the Qurʾān proclaimed, it brought a universal message for human guidance. Islam recognised the diversity of peoples and cultures, their laws and languages (Qurʾān, 5:48; 30:22; 2:136) and encouraged recognition of friendship among them (49:13). The Muslim community is described as the mid-most community (ummata wasaṭan), committed to moderation and justice (2:143): “The essence of all virtues (fadāʾil) and sound ẓūrāh lies in moderation in all matters.”

Ibn ʿĀshūr considers only real ideas (haqāʾiq) and mentally posited notions (iʿtibariyyat) in human intellectual perception to have flown from ẓūrāh. He dismisses illusions (wahmiyyāt) and imagination (takhayyulāt) as ẓūrāh, although they may have become closely linked to and confused with innate natural things owing to the misuse of reason. He further argues that the Shariʿah calls on its followers to safeguard ẓūrāh, to preserve the acts flowing from it, restore its obliterated aspects, and cleanse it from all that has crept into it. To illustrate, he makes mention of marriage and nursing, cooperation and companionship, protecting life and lineage, and above all the development of true civilisation as manifestations of ẓūrāh. He says that “anything leading to its (ẓūrāh’s) violation would be forbidden and avoided in the Shariʿah, whereas anything leading to its restoration and preservation would be ordained by it.”

Ẓūrāh is the source of universal guidance and is connected with the very creation of man as a creature possessing choice and free volition. It is because of ẓūrāh that humans affirm moral laws. Accordingly, ẓūrāh and reasoning, ẓūrāh and sound and moral judgement, are mutually harmonious. In other words, ẓūrāh is as objective and universal as reasoning; it is the capacity to exercise rational choice in matters of morality and faith. It is engraved in the soul of the agent and is the seat of consciousness, thoughts, volition, and feelings. The heart is the receptacle of ẓūrāh, though it could be ‘veiled’ or even dulled. Ibn ʿĀshūr’s grounding of maqāṣid in human nature is plausible not only in its own right but also in placing Islamic law in the context of recent developments in human knowledge, especially in the fields of philosophy and psychology.

According to Mohammad Hashim Kamali, “the study of ẓūrāh should enable one to identify what it is one must protect, how Islam protects it, what happens when one loses it, and how does one restore the natural balance once disturbed.” Kamali calls for a censorship of the various standards of ‘modern progress’ that may not be in tune with the healthy development of human ẓūrāh. He illustrates
with the following points:\textsuperscript{51}

1. The use of pre-school facilities for children at the early age of three to make them quickly intelligent is decried by Kamali, who argues that it is premature and may deprive children of their childhood. Children tend to learn by playing and not by studying, as demanded by their nature (\textit{fitrah}). Besides, excessive after-school tutoring results in the loss of natural inclinations in children, leaving them deprived and emotionally imbalanced.

2. The incessant drive for technological progress has led to the alarmingly unbalanced over-utilisation of resources on the part of industrial powers. The competition between industrial rivals and arms manufacturers leads to a despoiling of both the natural and human environment. Human rights and values are totally disregarded for the sake of commercial gain. All this has resulted in the loss of the natural balance demanded by \textit{fitrah}.

3. The dignity of women is sacrificed at the altar of advertising. An elegant car that can be advertised as such is presented with the picture of a half-naked girl. This excessive greed is contra to sound human nature and needs to be checked.

4. Although there is no denying the fact that women have suffered at the hands of men throughout history, this has resulted in the emergence of a full-fledged reactionary movement against patriarchy in the form of feminism. The overtures of feminism lead to a loss of society in the form of depriving children of motherly care and balanced emotional development.

Civilisation is the outward expression of human beings’ immense potential for improving their lives. It is reflective of the fact that humans continuously yearn to improve their condition while envisioning a better future. It is the result of human beings’ perpetual struggle to know themselves and the surrounding cosmos and preserve that knowledge for posterity. Civilisation building is inherent in human nature, as reflected, for example, by the attempts of small children to construct tombs out of sand while playing or making houses out of straw and organising themselves in different groupings. Islamic law is meant for the betterment of human beings herein and hereafter and it is in keeping with the requirements of sound human nature. Therefore, civilisation building efforts should be judged on the basis of their harmony with intact human nature. Any efforts that run contra to \textit{fitrah}, on the other hand, should not only be condemned but also discarded outright. Besides, Muslims need to understand the present time and clime in order to have a better understanding of the current relevance of Islam, especially its legal and ethical code. This will enable them to contribute towards the progress of human civilisation and shun the victim mentality. Legislation regarding novel
issues should be done in tandem with the requirements of human intellect and
nature so that the Islamic message does not become repulsive due to the unnatural
(against the fiṭrah) activities or behaviour of Muslims. Ibn ‘Āshūr’s grounding
of the higher objectives of Sharῑ’ah is highly potent for civilisation building as it
puts forth a purposive view of life that acts as a stimulus for adopting a dynamic
lifestyle rather than resorting to idleness.

Conclusion
From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Islam presents a comprehensive
concept of human nature. The scriptures of Islam not only make mention of fiṭrah
but also elaborate its positive and negative characteristics. Muslim scholars have
provided valuable insights on the subject of human nature that, on the one hand,
are reflective of their rational investigations and on the other, the complexity of
human nature. Ibn ‘Āshūr, an eminent Muslim scholar, has paid so much attention
to the subject of fiṭrah that he has grounded the objectives of Islamic legislation in
human nature, arguing that the preservation of fiṭrah is the supreme objective of
Islam, that all of its rulings are harmonious with human nature. Besides, anything
that contradicts sound human nature or hinders its preservation is forbidden
in Islam. In contemporary times, human beings have lost sight of themselves
owing to excessive involvement with the material world, which has resulted in
increasing dissatisfaction, anxiety, and a number of other psychological problems,
and despite immense scientific and technological progress. Therefore, a study
of human nature is indispensable for finding the solution to existing problems.
While framing public policies or making important life decisions, individual or
collective, fiṭrah needs to be considered rather made arbitrator. This will make
results more productive and less destructive regarding the overall welfare of
humanity. The Islamic views on fiṭrah in general and Ibn ‘Āshūr’s relating of
the higher purposes of Islamic law to fiṭrah can serve as the basis for an Islamic
approach to physical, psychological, and spiritual development thereby providing
a religious grounding for “developmental psychology.”

Notes
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1. Moḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-ʿArab al-Muhῑṭ, ed. A,
   al-ʿAlayali, (Beirut: Dār Lisān al-ʿArab, 1988), 4:1108-1109; Ḥusayn ibn
   Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, Al-Mufradāt fi Gharīb al-Qurʾān
   (Karachi, Pakistan: Nūr Muḥammad Aṣaḥḥ al-Maṭābi’, 1961), 389-90;
   Edward William


Unless otherwise mentioned, the translation of all the Quranic verses mentioned in this paper should be considered taken from the same translation.


22. Parantheses added.


26. Ibid.,7:27.
27. Ibid., 28.

28. Ibid.


31. Ibid., 367, 372.


34. Ibid.,


38. Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, The Outlines of Islamic Jurisprudence (Islamabad: Advanced Legal Studies Institute, 2000), 162–75


43. Ibn ʿĀshūr, Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah, 58.

44. Ibid., 81.

45. Ibid., 81.


47. Ibid., 285 (Parentheses added).


50. Ibid., 261.

51. Ibid., 261.