



Habib University
shaping futures



COLONIALISM & THE
POSTCOLONIAL

یکسین

Anthropocene

Epistemology

Liberal
Arts

فکر
اور
کنجی

Grace

**THE HABIB UNIVERSITY MISSION
AND ITS KEYWORDS**

Reparation

Inter- & Trans-disciplinarity

NATION-STATE
& NATIONALISM



قصد اور کنجی

THE HABIB UNIVERSITY MISSION
&
ITS KEYWORDS

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PREFACE

Dear Members of the Habib University Community,

I take great pride in introducing you to "QASD aur KUNJI – The Habib University Mission and its Keywords," a vital resource that shares insights into one of the world's most unique higher education institutions conceptualized a decade ago. It encapsulates the essence of our university's mission, values, and educational philosophy. This book is more than just a guide; it reflects our collective commitment to fostering a transformative educational environment that deeply resonates with the rich cultural and intellectual heritage of South Asia.

"QASD aur KUNJI" has been thoughtfully curated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the foundational principles that drive our institution. At its core, the book beautifully unravels and articulates the vision of Habib University, introducing and emphasizing the significance of an education that is rooted in the liberal arts - a broad-based knowledge foundation with an interdisciplinary approach to learning. It emphasizes the pursuit of knowledge that not only enriches our comprehension of the intricate layers of local contexts but also expands our capacity to engage thoughtfully with global challenges and opportunities. This approach nurtures constructive thinking, creativity, ethical reasoning, and a deep understanding of human experience.

Central to our educational philosophy is the commitment to developing and deepening our understanding of histories and narratives through a critical lens. This perspective enables us to comprehend the world within the complexities of a post-colonial reality and to think in reparative ways, addressing the enduring challenges and legacies of the past 300 years. The liberal arts model at Habib University transcends the mere acquisition of knowledge; it is dedicated to cultivating a critical consciousness that empowers students to question, analyze, and engage with the questions that define their own reality and the world in profoundly meaningful ways.

The book introduces Habib University's academic programs and initiatives that are central to achieving our institutional objectives. It underscores the significance of a holistic approach to education, which is concretely realized through the CPAC model—Content, Pedagogy, Assessment, Community. This unique framework shapes the undergraduate curriculum into a cohesive intellectual journey that is both tangible and transformative, rather than abstract. Through this model, students are invited to immerse themselves in a range of disciplines, acquire knowledge and skills, and embrace a sense of social responsibility. Our goal is to cultivate a dynamic community where each individual plays a role in advancing both personal and collective flourishing, supported by principles of empathy, honesty, and a deep appreciation for diverse perspectives.

This book is a landmark achievement, and we hope that it establishes a foundation for a shared understanding and perspectives for all members of our University community. I encourage all readers to reflect on how the learnings from this book can be further integrated into our daily practices and interactions with communities within and outside the University. Above all, I hope the book inspires you to embark on a journey of 'thoughtful self-cultivation', becoming a life-long learner, a better person, and an engaged and impactful member of our community.

Warm Regards,



Wasif A. Rizvi

President, Habib University

QASD
MISSION

QASD
MISSION

Our Unique Institution

Habib University is driven by a distinctive higher educational mission – committed to universal merit, and to education as a community-owned, aspirational enterprise, with a unique curriculum

Research shows that the primary factor behind the success of a higher-educational venture, is not in fact – as one might expect – the financial treasure and material resources at its disposal. These are, of course, also important. But the single most significant factor behind the lasting prosperity of a higher-educational venture is, in empirical fact, a sense of mission: a fact that flies in the face of the rampant cynicism of our times, restoring our hope in the viable nobility of human enterprise.¹ Indeed, coming into existence a mere decade ago – thanks to an unprecedented endowment by the Habib family – Habib University’s meteoric rise to the top tier of Pakistan’s educational landscape, amply corroborates this inspiring finding and this restorative hope: for Habib is one of very few private educational institutions in the contemporary world created not as a business enterprise, but out of a sense of mission.

The modern educational scene is increasingly dominated, both nationally and globally, by the profit-motive – which immediately excludes the vast majority of potential students from the best institutions due to financial constraints. In such a context, **Habib University is unique as an institution in our commitment to pure merit, and our traditional commitment to the noble pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination – ilm**, with its divine and luminous resonances – for truth, the good and excellence.

¹ Robert M. Hendrickson, et al., *Academic Leadership and Governance of Higher Education: A Guide for Trustees, Leaders, and Aspiring Leaders of Two- and Four-Year Institutions* (Sterling: Stylus Publishing, 2013).



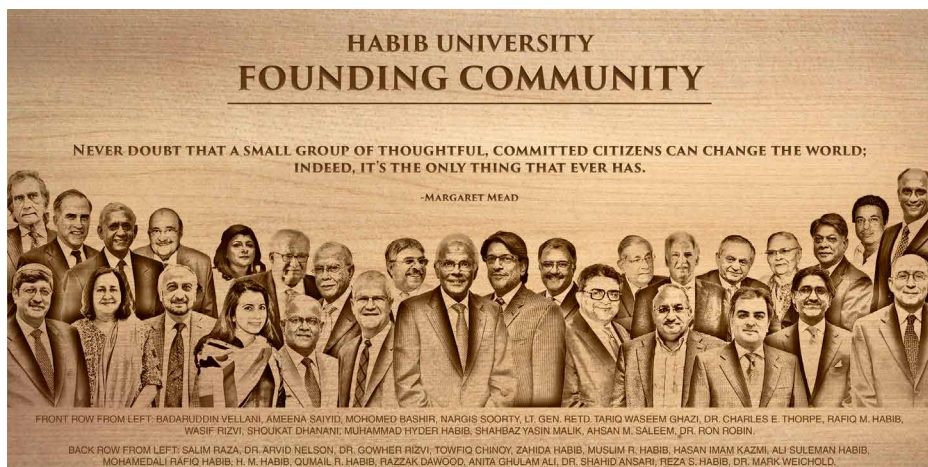
For it is not appropriate to knowledge to be treated as a means to any other ends. Knowledge is noble and ennobling – because it is related to truth, the good and excellence, it is perhaps the noblest possession we humans have – and is therefore to be pursued and disseminated not as a means to any other end (such as profit). It is also precisely such a passionate pursuit of knowledge for the sake of truth, the good and excellence, that inspires the ‘life-long learning’ that is often advocated – but little practiced – as the goal of higher education.

The fact that we are *not* a profit-making business enterprise is evident from the fact that far from making a profit, Habib University incurs an annual deficit running into several millions of dollars. Where does this huge deficit come from, and how is this very challenging model sustainable?

It comes from our commitment to excellence worthy of the noble enterprise of knowledge. Our commitment to excellence includes not only running and maintaining one of the best campuses in Pakistan (and beyond, since ours is an international prize-winning campus) – and more importantly, the employment of Habib University’s world-class faculty and staff, as well as the recruitment of outstanding students.

But most significantly of all, this huge financial deficit comes from our commitment to student merit: i.e., it comes from the fact that, uniquely as a private educational enterprise, Habib University barely charges its students. Above all, it is due to our unprecedented support and scholarship to students, that Habib University operates at a massive 70% deficit which requires an annual fundraising of more than two billion rupees (over 7 million US dollars). Another big engine of this deficit is a remarkable 35% built-in subsidy for even “full-paying” students, as Habib University has only nominally increased fees over the last many years, which did not keep pace with sharp inflationary rises. The very few students who pay “full” fees (about 15% of the total student body), still only pay 65% of the cost, and the other 35% is an automatic financial rebate/support given by the university to them. This is extraordinary commitment to merit in any context, let alone in the Global South, where resources are scarce.

How do we, then, make up this extraordinarily large financial deficit? This brings us to another important aspect of our mission: to make the commitment to education and knowledge part of the larger society, that is, to make higher education a community-owned mission. Hence, this huge deficit is covered by our growing body of hundreds of *Mohsineen*, generous donors – who themselves contribute to Habib University purely out of their *inspiration and commitment to our educational mission*.



In effect, our University is *reshaping philanthropy* for the noble and vital purpose of higher education in Pakistan – a country that fares even worse in the tertiary education sector than its abysmal showing in primary and secondary education indices. Our reshaping of educational philanthropy to include the tertiary sector could not be more significant: it serves to orient such philanthropy towards aspirational ends that go far beyond ‘charity’ as it is usually understood. In a philanthropic environment where only about 0.06% of all philanthropy has been directed towards higher education, our *reshaping philanthropy* initiative is a daring and transformative venture.

Indeed, when Habib University began operations, we were regularly told that what Pakistan needed was primary education: a statement that not only posits a false and misleading competition between levels of education – which is not a zero-sum game – but is demeaning to the **legitimate higher aspirations of the fifth largest national population in the world**. In fact, such an approach is historically grounded in a racist and colonial, stagist view of human flourishing, one that posits a false equivalence between an individual’s development from infancy to maturity, and the histories of peoples and collectivities.

So, apart from our commitment to the nobility of knowledge, to excellence, to universal merit, and to education as a societal, community-owned and aspirational enterprise, what is our educational mission in its curricular content? This brings us to one of the most globally recognized unique features of the Habib University mission.

Postcolonial Liberal Arts & Yohsin

Habib University's liberal arts curriculum is curated to enable the thoughtful self-cultivation of individuals, and is at the vanguard of higher educational envisioning and transformation from a postcolonial perspective

Liberal Arts

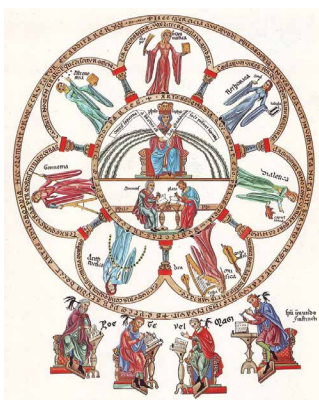
Habib University was born out of a sense of crisis. It was born out of a sense that prevalent models of higher education in Pakistan (and indeed the world) have failed to produce the kind of thoughtful citizens and leaders, who could recognize and make sense of the growing problems of the modern world, and help solve them and repair our broken, ailing world.



*Conditional Love - Wall art by
Sarx404. Retrieved from
streetartutopia.com*

The world is becoming increasingly confusing and anarchic, seemingly beyond the comprehension and control of even educated people, including leaders – a confusion and incomprehension leading, in a vicious circle, to further damage and destruction rather than repair and healing, including in the widespread forms of various irrational and violent mindsets, including among literate and ‘educated’ people: indeed, **formally** educated people are to be found virtually everywhere in leadership positions of the forces of violence and destruction in our world.

One of the key reasons for this state of affairs is the increasingly narrow focus of so-called 'higher education' – thanks to its reduction to what is essentially vocational training, rather than an expansive and critical knowledge that heals and empowers the individual and the world. This is the only kind of education that can help shape alternative futures – changing the destinies of both individuals and of our common world: shaping futures.



Philosophy and the Seven Liberal Arts from Hortus Deliciarum, created by Herrad of Landsberg. Retrieved from liberalarts.org.uk

Here is where Habib University's unique model of liberal arts comes in. Habib University is *not* a vocational training school, where students enroll to acquire a single skill. All of our students – whether they are in the Dhanani School of Science & Engineering, or the School of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences – receive an expansive education in the most critical areas of contemporary knowledge that allow them to understand the modern world, and be thoughtful and creative citizens in it.

But there are, in fact, today enormously vast fields of knowledge across the divisions of the natural and social sciences, the humanities and the arts, impossible to cover for any individual living in this age. So, then, in what *insight* do we ground, and under what *program* do we select and organize these knowledges, such that together, the insight and the program do justice to both our contextual and regional perspective and inheritance, as well as to our contemporary global situation, our personal lives as much as our common condition?

Yohsin & Thoughtful Self-Cultivation

The insight that grounds our liberal arts program is, in fact, the motto of Habib University, which drives our overall educational mission and operations across our campus and beyond. As referenced above, research shows that the primary factor behind the lasting success of a higher-educational venture is a sense of mission.

Habib University's **unique educational mission is driven by the noble and inspiring motto**, which is also the basis of our bold trademark, *Shaping Futures*: قِيَمَةُ كُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا يُحْسِنُهُ (*qimatu kulli imri ma yohsinahu*) – ‘the worth of every human is in their *thoughtful self-cultivation*’ – the key to transforming, shaping and empowering the individual, and the world. Proudly drawn and translated from our Islamic spiritual and sapiential heritage, our choice of motto goes far beyond any merely symbolic gesture, in the **commanding depth and luminosity of its vision for the human and our potential**: pure of all the despair, cynicism, darkness and misanthropy so widespread today.



Every Human Being's Worth is in their YOHsin

This vibrantly radiant aphorism – including especially its luminous and pulsating heart, the word ‘yohsin’ – plays the role of a guiding star at Habib across its various departments and offices, so it is important to understand its multiple dimensions and implications.

In the widely available Urdu translation of Islam's preeminent sage after the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) – from whom wisdom traditions have been disseminated across sects, throughout the Islamic world and civilization – Imam Ali's (AS) renowned discourses, *Nahj-ul-balagha* (Limit of Eloquence/Wisdom), this saying is translated simply as, "the worth of every human is in their 'ہُنَر' (*hunar*: particular craft, or skill – what one does well)". The saying, however, as well as the specific word, *yohsin*, are much richer and more suggestive than this translation offers, and deserve our attention and analysis.

To begin with, the Arabic saying specifically uses the word 'اِمْرِي' (*imri*) for the human – rather than, say, the more familiar 'انسان' (*insan*) or 'بَشَر' (*bashr*), each of which have their own specific connotations: the former suggesting the human in its sociability, affection and intimacy (from 'اُنْس' [*uns*]), the latter indicating the propitious, even prophetic character of the human. 'Imri' derives from 'مَرَا' (*mara'a*), which indicates wholesomeness and health, thus suggesting the human as salubrious.

One could be forgiven, however, for first thinking that 'اِمْرِي' is related to 'اَمْر' (*amr*, order or command), since it shares the first three letters. Indeed, such multiple possibilities and connections of letters, words, roots and meanings were continually present in the minds of the most adept and skillful practitioners of the extraordinary Arabic language – none more so than the most eloquent and wise Imam – who regularly take advantage of them to amplify the force, depth and potential of their eloquence.

If, then, we allow here such a connection between 'اِمْرِي' (*imri*) and 'اَمْر' (*amr*) – even if the mainstream linguistic sciences might not – this would further suggest the human in our commanding, or imperative aspect: the fact that in and through our actions, we each as it were, will the creation of a particular kind of order – the fact that we have a *significant* impact on the world, setting a personal example and imposing a particular direction and shape on its order.



*The Self Made Woman - Sculpture by
Avantgarde3dStudio. Retrieved from
etsy.com*

Even more significantly, the word ‘yohsin’ stems from ‘husn’, which has strong connotations of (ethical) beauty or grace, and is also the root of the noble words ‘ahsan’ (excellent, or exalted), as well as ‘ihsan’ (favour, or generosity), thus these senses also resonate in it. This is why we derive our guiding values of grace, excellence, respect, service, and passion from ‘yohsin’ (passion because where there is beauty, generosity and excellence, love and passion are necessarily at work). It is telling of a larger significance, to note here that these expansive and lofty resonances of the Arabic word ‘husn’ are all but identical to the elevating senses that reverberate in the Greek word ‘kalon’: which simultaneously signifies ‘beautiful’, ‘good’, ‘noble’, or ‘fine’ – as dazzlingly illuminated in multiple dialogues of Plato, a philosopher to whom many Muslims took like bees to nectar.

But how do we get from there to *thoughtful self-cultivation*? ‘Yohsin’ is a verb – that is, it is an activity: an activity that produces the qualities of grace, service, passion and excellence. What can such activity be, but ‘thoughtful self-cultivation’? This translation of *yohsin* indicates the loving labour of graceful self-transformation and elevation of stature, that is deliberate and generously inclined towards others and the world – thus contributing also to the creation of a beautiful, reparative order in the world.

The Imam's exalted aspiration for the human here, reflects also the Prophet's awe-inspiring directive, demanding of mortals an impossible ascension: 'تخلقوا' – 'cultivate the ethos of the God', the very God who, he tells us in another lustrous *hadith*, is 'beautiful and loves beauty' (إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَمِيلٌ يُحِبُّ الْجَمَالَ), at once an arresting definition of, and a powerful glimpse into the nature and ethos of Divinity (resonating, of course, with the theme of beauty and grace in our own motto). *Yohsin* instructively translates the Prophet's imposing words, measuring them for our secular imagination and regular application: our thoughtful self-cultivation.

To elaborate further, if we now take the first derivation of *imri* (from *mara'a*), the saying suggests that in so far as the human is a wholesome, healthy being, our worth lies in the extent to which we thoughtfully cultivate ourselves – that is, in the measure of beauty, generosity and excellence our specific activity brings forth in the world, thus healing and replenishing it. This is how we realize our distinctively human potential in the world: what makes each of us humans worthy of our salubrious name, '*imri*'.

If we allow the relation of *imri* to *amr* (remember that 'i' and 'a' here – the first letters of the two words, respectively – are the same Arabic letter, *aleph*), then another reason that the Imam might have chosen the word '*imri*' for the human in this saying also suggests itself: In our being and activity in the world – which is always impactful, setting an example to others and shaping the world in a certain direction, imposing a particular order around us – we must strive to create a beautiful world, a world that is full of grace and generosity, an exalted and excellent world.



Idealist - A pot created by an unknown artist. Retrieved from getpotted.com

In the midst of all that is ugly and wrong in the world, this is what it means to repair and heal it, what it means to strive to create a beautiful and generous, wholesome and salubrious, reparative order – and this is necessarily a highly aware, reflective activity: requiring on our part, thoughtful self-cultivation. Again, this is what makes each of us humans worthy of our commanding name, ‘*imri*’ (this time, conjecturally of course) – what it means to appropriately and authentically exercise the commanding power we have each been gifted by the Creator, as His quirky creature ‘*imri*’.

Given all of the above, it may not be hyperbole to venture that, if there is any meaning at all in what is today often thought to be a meaningless world, what else can it be but this: *yohsin* – thoughtful self-cultivation? *Yohsin* is a teaching at once ‘secular’ – since it is, in any case, a maxim perfect for inspired and salubrious action in this world – and ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’: since it at once carries the promise of salvation in the next.

Our generative motto also serves as an inspiring and invigorating model for the higher education of young adults – undergraduate students at Habib University – in an age afflicted with widespread despair and nihilism.

Note that even if we were to take the more common translation of ‘*yohsin*’ as ‘*hunar*’ – the special craft or skill you bring to the world – all of the above would still resonate in it. That is, in whatever profession you choose, such thoughtful self-cultivation of grace, respect, service, and passion is what would impel you to excellence in your work.

The Imam is precisely known for such breviloquence, avoiding all patter, platitude and pomp – as is his master, the Prophet, as well as the other Imams and the exalted women from the Prophet’s nurturing household, such as the Ladies Fatima and Zainab – all known for their mastery of, as we say in Urdu, the art of *darya ko kuzay mein band karna*, ‘capturing a river in a cup’ (only, this river flows from the heavens through the Earth). They propitiously measure every word they utter to maximally disclose its indicative potential – turning every phoneme (unit of sound) into a luminous and radiant sememe (unit of meaning) – expressing themselves in compactly eloquent, compelling and restorative sayings that are full of reflective potential, that is, prophetically full of meaning and insight, a refreshing resource of elevating wisdom and light for ages to come, thus exemplifying the extraordinary signifying potential of the human: *bashr* – the human in its propitious and prophetic potential.

Finally, it is important to note that Habib University’s decade-long championing of self-cultivation as the goal of education, anticipates current cutting-edge research in the fields of education, the humanities and social sciences and beyond, as a quick google search will readily show. Once again, Habib University has been in the vanguard of higher educational envisioning and transformation.

We do add ‘thoughtful’ to ‘self-cultivation’ in our translation of *yohsin* – to guard it against a superficially aesthetic self-stylization – thus emphasizing both deliberation, as well as thoughtfulness towards others, since the specific connotations of *husn*, and thus *yohsin*, at once strongly imply such an ethical orientation in the very meaning of ‘beauty’.

Postcolonial Liberal Arts

What are the knowledges that enable such reparative thoughtful self-cultivation for an undergraduate today, in our unprecedented moment in regional and planetary history? One of the reasons that contemporary liberal arts core curricula are often so underwhelming and uninspiring for students is that these curricula are, on the one hand, often detached from the urgent questions of our time, and on the other hand, they lack overall coherence and direction – in effect, they have no perspective or program. We do.

As the title of this section indicates – ‘Postcolonial Liberals Arts’ – Habib University’s liberal arts model is distinctive and different from prevalent liberal arts institutions around the world. The ‘liberal arts’ emerged in antiquity from a holistic idea of education, encompassing all the existing fields of knowledge. Such an education was considered essential to the cultivation and formation of free citizens, able to participate in public debate and deliberation on matters relevant to the polity, or community.



The School of Athens - Fresco by Raphael. Retrieved from antigonejournal.com

A holistic – indeed, all but total – idea of learning remained prevalent, including in the Islamic world, through the medieval and early modern periods, well into the Enlightenment, until the fragmentation of knowledge later in the career of modernity. In the contemporary period, a liberal arts education seeks to repair some of this fragmentation through an education spanning the modern divisions of knowledge into the natural and social sciences, humanities and the arts.

Until recently, however, liberal arts curricula in the latter divisions – social sciences, humanities and the arts – focused exclusively on the Western ‘canon’ (books, texts or artworks considered ‘classical’ to the West), and looked at history, as well as matters of culture, economy, society and politics from a provincially Western perspective. This was the case not just in the West, but also in the Third World, that is, the part of the world that has been brutally colonized and exploited by the West in the modern period!

Things began to change, in some measure, during the anticolonial movement, and subsequently in the wake of decolonization and the defeat of fascism. In the West itself, significant changes began to come about in the 1970s and ’80s, thanks to the civil rights and Third Worldist movements, followed by the multiculturalism movement.



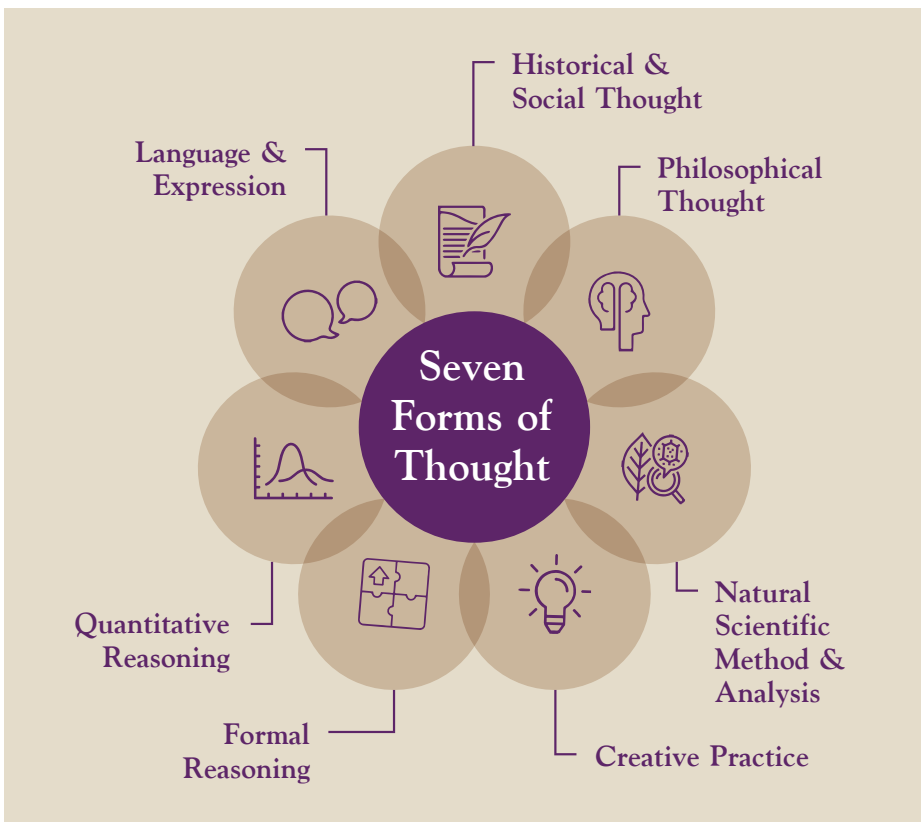
Dandi March - Historical photo led by Mahatma Gandhi. Retrieved from thebindu.com

Habib University's model is unique, however, in that it offers a liberal arts *core* curriculum that is curated from an explicitly *postcolonial perspective on modern global history and society*, as well as a *postcolonial reparative vision* that seeks to restore the philosophical, spiritual and ethical inheritance of our regional traditions, on the basis of which we may then contribute to a distinctive vision for a transformative and reparative global future at this critical moment in planetary history.

Apart from the narrow focus on vocational training, a key reason that we are unable to think otherwise, and cultivate and fashion ourselves in ways that are innovative, liberating and reparative for both ourselves and the world – even when we may want to do so – is that current models and programs of tertiary education are locked and trapped in exhausted discourses, frameworks and narratives that have increasingly little or no relationship to our experience and reality. In this respect, Habib University is evidently at the vanguard of what appears to be the second great historical moment of decolonization, one that bears the promise of forging new concepts and pathways out of our current predicament of historical and personal impasse: the recently risen global movements for the decolonization of education from Africa to Asia to Europe and the Americas. Here's how we do it at Habib.

Habib University's Forms of Thought

Habib University's globally recognized Habib Liberal Core Curriculum is currently composed of ten courses distributed under seven different *Forms of Thought*. There are a number of reasons for our choice of the expression 'Forms of Thought' for the organizing principle of the distribution of knowledges in our core curriculum.



The resonating word ‘form’ has, to begin with, the advantage of referring to areas of knowledge in a way that combines specificity with generality, since ‘form’ indicates both a particular concrete shape (body of knowledge), even as it points to something essential and ideal (at least since Plato). ‘Form’ is also a pleasing word, bearing an aesthetic look – suggesting a ‘beautiful form’ – thus hinting at the attraction and beauty of knowledge in all its forms. It may also evoke the word ‘*inform*’, which is of course an essential function of knowledge. Finally, it suggests a certain *active* dimension to knowledge – i.e., knowledge as *formed*, thus indicating the synthetic and synthesizing nature and work of knowledge.

Second, the word ‘thought’ is a powerfully inclusive word for human cognition in general: it would be as unremarkable, e.g. to refer to ‘artistic thought’, as to ‘scientific thought’ – thus performing the urgent task of levelling the playing field of knowledge, essential to a confident and spirited liberal arts. ‘Thought’ also has the added cognitive advantage of indicating reflection, intensifying cognition: thus commending a higher order and intensity of knowledge. Furthermore, it invokes ‘thoughtfulness’, which strongly connotes empathy and ethical concern, thus accrediting a necessary connection between cognition and action, knowledge and its ethical application. Finally, of course, ‘thought’ propitiously resonates with our guiding motto of *yohsin: thoughtful self-cultivation*.

In Forms of Thought, then, we believe we have an expression of great depth and beauty – with as much resonance and signifying power, as elegance and grace – for the organizing principle of the distribution of knowledges in our distinctive core curriculum.

Under the Habib Liberal Core Curriculum's *Forms of Thought*, first comes 'Historical & Social Thought', in recognition of the unprecedented and increasing cognitive relevance of historical and social awareness in modern times (about which, more below). In this Form of Thought, students take two courses unique to Habib University: (a) *What is Modernity?*, and (b) *Pakistan & Modern South Asia (PAMSA)*. In the first course on *Modernity*, which students take in the second semester of their first year, students work through the following six modules:

- i) **Modernity & Historical Identity:** the origins of the virulently racist and environmentally destructive modern ideas of Progress and the so-called 'civilizing mission', which have enabled and justified the genocide, enslavement and brutal colonization of most of the world's populations for several centuries in the modern period, as well as the devastation of our planet Earth – and which now, thanks to the acute historical distortion and conceptual incoherence of the modern idea of Progress, are causing severe cognitive dissonance in our perception and understanding of our historical reality, our actual ecological and social condition, our precarious planetary situation;



American Progress by John Gast (1872). Retrieved from picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu

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- ii) **Political Modernity:** the modern emergence of, on the one hand, the oppressive, imperialist and militaristic modern nation-state and nationalism – that have drawn red lines across the face of the Earth, in the form of modern borders, forcefully dividing virtually the entire global human population into stifling silos of ‘national’ cultures, histories, economies, politics, indeed so-called ‘national existence’ – and on the other hand, the modern emergence of the racist and genocidal, ruthlessly extractive and systematically divisive, modern colonial state;
 - iii) **Modernity & Religion:** the emergence of modern religious nationalism that has utterly transformed religious traditions for political ends – first, absolutist and national in the early modern Europe of the Reformation, then colonial, and then again national in the wake of decolonization – tearing apart communities all over the world in the modern period, even as it ruins and wrecks our inheritances;
 - iv) **Economic Modernity:** the emergence of modern capitalism, which has reduced human life to accumulation and consumption, not to mention brutalization, exploitation, immiseration, alienation and ecological destruction;
 - v) **Modernity & Hyper-Masculinity:** the modern transformation of masculinity to make men more ambitious, competitive, aggressive and authoritarian, to prepare them to enforce the fierce order of modernity outlined in the preceding modules;
 - vi) **Modernity & Ecology:** and finally, the modern transformation of the human relationship to nature that now threatens the very integrity of the biosphere, the survival of planetary life, including of course the human species.



Contaminación Industrial (Industrial Pollution) by Tomás Castaño. Retrieved from singularart.com

As is evident from this brief description, Core 102: *What is Modernity?* is unique not only in Pakistan, but globally. Habib students and alumni widely report that Core 102 is singularly transformative of their worldview, demanding a great deal of *unlearning, reflection and insight* – which are at the heart of learning and education itself – putting them far ahead and apart from their peers outside Habib in terms of their analysis and understanding of the world, helping them excel. They also report that by challenging them to confront the history and menacing features of our darkening world, the class compels them to think and act ethically.

What is Modernity? serves as a powerful antidote to the complacency that dominant models of education (including in the liberal arts) otherwise inculcate in students, feeding them what is essentially propaganda about the purported glories of the modern world – increasingly incongruous in our deeply troubled time – and reassuring them about their own exalted place in it as ‘enlightened’ moderns. The modern ideology of Progress is a kind of supra-collective *historical* narcissism, closely related to the collective narcissism of nationalism – not to mention the individual narcissism the modern system encourages through multiple sources. Through its deep critical reflection on the dominant narrative of history itself, Core 102 breaks out of the cul-de-sac of this narcissistic and self-perpetuating historical discourse that is cognitively and existentially so disabling, especially in our time of climate catastrophe.

Such complacency and narcissism lull and mortify thinking, rather than awakening and enlivening it – thus dangerously obscuring reality, rather than thoughtfully illuminating it. Far from provoking astonishment, wonder, disturbance, cognitive courage (*himmat*) and questioning, they opiate students, stultifying critical reflection and evaluation, as well as enervating the imagination, insight and intuition, and weakening judgment and understanding.

They are thus the very opposite of education: damaging the cognitive potential of the student, rather than repairing and enhancing it, since humility, love of truth, openness, self-criticism, analysis, imagination and comprehension – in a word, thoughtfulness – are all, in fact, essential to cognition and cognitive development.

Complacency and narcissism, it should be needless to say, are also great personal faults and social ills – evermore menacing in our darkening world: quite apart from the cognitive and pedagogical disservice their inculcation does to the undergraduate student maturing at – and in – such a critical age.

Indeed, the curriculum and pedagogical program of *What is Modernity?* have become evermore strikingly relevant and compelling every single year – such is the nature and pace of our times – since the course was first taught in the Spring of 2015 (to Habib’s first cohort of 2018, our ‘co-founders’, as we call them): thus corroborating and authenticating the analytical, diagnostic, and pedagogical power of Habib University’s Liberal Core Curriculum.



Shadow Lines by Zainul Abedin (1943).

Retrieved from tandfonline.com

What is Modernity? is followed in their second year by PAMSA – Core 201: *Pakistan & Modern South Asia* – which is primarily about the dramatic destruction and transformation of our region during the modern period – our region which was left incredibly impoverished, environmentally devastated, and socially and culturally torn apart by two centuries of violently racist, ruthlessly extractive, intensively exploitative, and systematically mischievous and divisive colonial rule: under which, for example, many tens of millions of people died of famine, thanks to the unprecedented and extreme racism and hyper-extractivism of British policies – famines which never happened before or since modern British rule – not to mention the fact that colonial rule wrecked the South Asian economy (the current estimate of colonial extraction from our region is the staggering amount of 45 trillion dollars!), as well as fracturing society, making enemies of centuries-long neighbors, thus condemning our region to virtually permanent conflict and the ever-present danger of civil war, along multiple cultural and social divisions, either created or hardened by modern apartheid colonial statecraft: perhaps the greatest catastrophic legacy of all of modern colonialism.

Moreover, even though *formal* decolonization improved matters to a considerable extent, our regional postcolonial nation-states inherited – in their very form, institutions, and goals – many of the worst features of the colonial state and world-order, accounting for many aspects of our present predicaments and confusions, as well as our own growing contribution to the creation of a disastrous regional and global condition. As should again be evident, PAMSA is quite a distinctive *core* curricular feature of Habib.



Treasures of Time by Sadequain. Retrieved from sadequainfoundation.com

Thus the first *Form of Thought* – ‘Historical & Social Thought’ – comprising *What is Modernity?* and PAMSA, serves to immediately orient our students towards a deeply informed and interdisciplinary, social scientific and humanistic analysis of the history and distinctive features of their contemporary global and regional worlds. These courses help them develop a powerful and rigorous perspective, and a rich vocabulary to identify, situate, analyze, and grapple in other ways with the many distinctive characteristics, crises and problems of our unprecedented moment in human history. Such a deep historical orientation and perspective is essential to thoughtful self-cultivation in modern times, in which dramatic – indeed, increasingly, drastic – transformation is pervasive across the fields of experience and existence.

In effect, against the classic paradigm of an all but antiquarian notion of the liberal arts that prioritizes the ‘canon’, Habib University’s Liberal Core Curriculum sequentially foregrounds the dramatic history of the modern present: to forcefully capture the attention of the contemporary student, and vigorously engage their critical reflection. It is a profoundly relevant and pedagogically effective strategy: the foregrounding of the history of the present in a time that is essentially defined by accelerating historical transformation, the time of our late modernity.

Our core curricular strategy also works like a charm for what comes next: the ‘canon’-based part of the Core. By giving them a highly analytical and critical perspective on the modern present, both *What is Modernity?* and PAMSA prepare the students to read and take seriously, premodern texts and ideas. These two challenging courses make Habib students acutely and critically aware of the historical specificity and uniqueness of their modern world and its features. They soften the students’ steely modern arrogance – unmooring them from the hard modern certainties that are so ubiquitous in our world – thus making them more appreciative of both the historical difference, as well as the potential, even the urgent relevance of the past and its inheritance to our re-orientation in the modern present, towards other possible futures, both for the world and for ourselves.

What comes next is, in fact, included in the second *Form of Thought* in the Habib Liberal Core Curriculum, which is again unique to higher education at our University: ‘Philosophical Thought’, under which all Habib students take *two* courses each. This is again a highly extraordinary core curricular requirement at Habib, and stems from our singular commitment to thoughtfulness and reflection, stemming again from our motto of *yohsin*, ‘thoughtful self-cultivation’.

The first course they take under this *Form of Thought* – in the second semester of their sophomore year – is titled, *Hikma: The Inheritance of Islamic Thought*. *Hikma* seeks to repair and restore the Muslim tradition's extraordinary commitment to wisdom – hikma – which the Quran calls *khairan kaseera* ('abundant good'). Islam, like other premodern religions and spiritual traditions, has a highly philosophical and wisdom-loving inheritance, which has been suppressed in the modern period, and framed as irrelevant to the supposed 'exigencies' of modernity.

يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا

He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good.

Surah Al-Baqarah Ayat 269

Core 202: Hikma forcefully signals the *reparative* and *therapeutic* intent of our core curriculum. Among the key findings of the Habib Liberal Core is the dramatic distortion and disorientation of the cognitive and cultural maps of our societies and traditions. *Hikma* aims to repair some of the conceptual damage done by both colonial-modern and modern-national processes and structures – a reparative and therapeutic purpose ('therapeutic' in the proper sense of *healing*) intimately associated with philosophy since antiquity: in the Muslim context, the connection between healing and philosophy is explicitly given in the simultaneous meanings of the words, '*hikma*' and '*hakim*' (who is at once a wise person or philosopher, and a medical doctor or healer). *Core 202: Hikma* thus seeks to conceptually *reorient* us towards a more genuine and salubrious inheritance and future, both individually in the intimacy of our selves, as well as in our relations with others – indeed with existence and the cosmos as such. In effect, this is to restore the conceptual architecture that makes 'Islam' a *sapiential* – i.e., a wisdom-oriented and a philosophical – tradition.

Above all, our *Hikma* course is philosophically grounded in *love*. In successive weeks of the course, love is demonstrated to be:

- i) essential to Divinity – to begin with, in the *preeminent* divine quality of ‘*rahma*’, ‘loving mercy’, a maternally loving and nurturing quality, from ‘*rahîm*’ – ‘womb’ – a uterine association with Divinity divinely ordained (as reported in a *hadith-e-qudsi*: “I am God (*Allah*), I am the Compassionate One (*Al-Rahîm*). I created the womb (*‘rahîm*’), and named it after My Name”);
- ii) essential also to wisdom – which is inspired and impelled by love: love of God, i.e., love of truth, the good, and of loving;
- iii) essential again to the Quran and the *hadith*;
- iv) the preeminent teaching of our saints and friends of God;
- v) the ubiquitous theme of our poetry, earthly and divine;
- vi) also resonant throughout our philosophical, social, and even political textual heritage.



Love is such an important part of the Muslim tradition that in the past, it was called *mazhab-e-ishq* ('religion of love') – in dramatic contrast to not only our modern repute, but even to our own contemporary self-understanding. Not only was love central to 'philosophy' itself (indicated in the prefix '*phil*' – meaning 'love' in Greek – as well as in key dialogues of Plato), but love was also understood in Islamicate cultures, societies and knowledges as the most primordial cosmic, social and existential force that grounds creation and existence, and directs their unfolding logic and purpose. Love is thus essential to the nature of existence and reality as such: and thus key to both cognition and practice, to knowledge as much as to ethics. Indeed, one catches a glimpse of this love and affection in the preeminent name for the human itself in the Muslim tradition: *insan* (as indicated earlier).

Other major themes of the *Hikma* course include the theme of *beauty* ('God is beautiful and loves beauty', according to a famous *hadith qudsi*), and of *light* which again, is central to our traditional understanding of God – 'Light upon Light', as the Quran says of the Divinity – and the luminous beauty of His creation, as well as of the luminescent faculty of intellect that illuminates being and existence.

Love, Beauty & Light: a world based on mutual and universal affection and friendship – a world metaphysically grounded firmly in the luminous love that impelled the divine act of creation itself, and that still reverberates and surges through the cosmos, propelling it and holding it together at once; a world in love with the loving Creator, His numerous creatures, and His beautiful and luminous creation; a world also that values and enables beautiful, graceful and affectionate human existence, relations, creations and forms in the world, thus making being and the world more luminous – striving to reflect the luminosity of Divine Love, Beauty and Intellect in the here and now.

Love, Beauty & Light: what could be more transformative of the individual and the world – as well as reparative of our mangled tradition, our inheritance?

Such a reparative envisioning of the past is essential to the task of imagining and shaping reparative futures – for **the past serves as precedent and possibility in human cognition and action: thus without alternative pasts, there are no alternative futures.**

Another way of understanding the logic of the sequence of courses outlined above – *What is Modernity?* followed by PAMSA, and then *Hikma* – is to think of it as the cognitive analogue of what may be entailed in the healing of critically advanced illness (for such, alas, is our collective cognitive condition). Such a situation may specifically require surgery – sometimes multiple surgeries, that even though they may be painful, are in fact reparative – to be followed by curative medication. Here, *What is Modernity?* and PAMSA may be likened to two successive cognitive surgeries (with summer and winter vacations, respectively, for post-surgical recovery!), followed by the healing of *Hikma*: which, indeed, besides ‘wisdom’, felicitously – and tellingly in terms of our reparative program – also means ‘medicine’ in common parlance in our region.

It is important to note here, that the reparative approach outlined above, sharply distinguishes Habib University’s program of epistemic decolonization from some dangerous trends in the current educational decolonization movement – trends that promote national chauvinism in the name of ‘decolonization’ (in our region, eg, the BJP has been widely guilty of this cynical, nationalist appropriation of the decolonial movement). These opportunistic and perilous trends are in synergy with the alarming recent resurgence, or rise of assertive fascism across the globe. In fact, national chauvinism is a direct inheritance of modern apartheid colonialism itself: it mimics the original national and racial chauvinism that led to modern genocidal and brutal colonialism – eventually fascism and world war – thus proliferating the very forces and mindsets that led to our own and the planet’s damage and destruction.



Human Hands Holding and Protecting the Planet Earth by an unknown artist. Retrieved from thequint.com

As the above sequence of courses culminating in *Hikma* shows, the Habib Liberal Core Curriculum is global and regional, universalist and planetary – rather than nationalist – in its decolonial orientation and aspiration. We must all thoughtfully repair and heal our own damaged and deformed, histories, selves and traditions, and inspire each other to do so, for the salvation of all humanity, all creatures – not just for ourselves, but for our common and only habitable planet, Earth: our divinely gifted home in the cosmos.

Apart from *Hikma*, all Habib students are also required to take another elective course from our offerings in philosophy, to further develop their powers of conceptualization, reflection, abstraction and theorization. Habib University's curricular commitment to philosophy is in line with contemporary research that shows that the subject of **philosophy has a profound impact on the cognitive abilities and potential of students across their entire education**, as well as on their performance in whatever their field of specialization, since it develops the higher-order thinking that intensifies and elevates cognition, developing the visionary quality essential to leadership.

The next *Form of Thought* is 'Language & Expression', which are of course essential to life, education, and social and professional communication. Students take two courses to fulfill the requirements of this *Form of Thought*: (1) In their very first semester, they take *Rhetoric & Communication*, a course in collegiate-level reading and writing skills; and subsequently they take (2) *Jehan-e-Urdu*, an inspiring and eye-opening class in modern Urdu literature – thus uniquely again, we demand of our students advance *bilingual* proficiency. Of course, virtually all the other courses they take at Habib further develop their linguistic powers.

The other *Forms of Thought* comprising the Habib Liberal Core Curriculum include one course each in the following areas: (4) 'Formal Reasoning', which advances students' powers of logic and rationality; (5) 'Quantitative Reasoning', that develops their ability to understand and develop numerical forms of analysis and argumentation; (6) 'Natural Scientific Method & Analysis', that teaches them about the rigorous nature of scientific work; and (7) 'Creative Practice', that develops their ability to express their knowledge in creative forms, whether it is in music, writing, art and film, or in technology produced in engineering and computer science workshops.

Together, these Forms of Thought ensure that all Habib students are introduced to essential areas of modern knowledge, and are also able to apply their knowledge in creative ways in the world.

Discussions and plans are also currently underway to introduce two new courses under a new *Form of Thought*: 'Future Thought.' The first course, titled *Contemplation & Thoughtful Self-Cultivation*, will be introduced in their first semester to help students consciously develop contemplative habits in their everyday life and study, so crucial to insight and understanding, envisioning and realization, as well as to transformation and character development: in short, to *shaping futures*.

The recent fields of Contemplative Studies and Contemplative Pedagogy have impacted thoughtful educational programs at every level of education, and represent the cutting edge of visionary pedagogy. The introduction of *Contemplation & Thoughtful Self-Cultivation* takes on a special urgency in the age of accelerating distraction, and the destruction of attention. Attention is not only, and self-evidently, the very condition of the possibility of all cognition and learning. Attention is also foundational to ethics and social existence – not to mention self-cultivation, self-reparation and flourishing.



*Lorène - Sculpture by Jean Michel
Biborel. Retrieved from
designcollector.net*

The second course, *Reparative Futures*, will be introduced in their junior year, and will provide students a framework for envisioning how healing and justice can be actualized across the *Forms of Thought* for the production of salubrious knowledge and practice. The course will include modules on degrowth and a just global order, committed at once to both human and ecological flourishing and well-being; a reparative approach to philosophy that recognizes the universal aspiration for wisdom as lying at the heart of philosophical inquiry in innumerable forms, idioms and traditions across the globe; a reparative approach to language that does not reduce it to a mere tool, or instrument of manipulation, but engages it as the genuine medium of expression and collective investigation; and a reparative approach to science and technology that firmly grounds them in society, that recognizes their own limits, and is thus self-reflexively open to the plurality of the forms of knowledge, thus to interdisciplinary conversation, investigation, and research.

As is evident, in its inspiration, coherence and vision, our Core goes far beyond any 'general education' program. The Habib Liberal Core Curriculum ensures that all of our students are highly aware, thoughtful, distinctive and creative citizens of the modern world, and are able to bring a unique reparative perspective that is simultaneously global and regional to its many, and increasing problems. The Core is essential to the Habib mission that has brought not only world-class faculty and excellent students, but also attracted so many outside our University, in the larger national and world community, inspired by our unique vision, to enable the work of Habib University.

Our Postcolonial Higher Education Conference

Habib University's flagship annual conference is yet another emblem of our transformative mission

Apart from our postcolonial liberal core curriculum, Habib University's unique educational vision is also reflected in our flagship, globally distinctive annual Postcolonial Higher Educational Conference (PHEC). Over the past decade, Habib's PHEC has become an intellectual event recognized for its cutting-edge and thought-provoking conference themes, bringing outstanding global scholars to Pakistan's intellectual landscape. The PHEC is yet another emblem of Habib's aspiration to be a catalyst for the transformation of the milieu of higher education, not just in Pakistan, but globally.

Since its beginning in 2013, the PHEC has featured general investigations into (italicizing some of the themes and topics of successive conferences): the *postcolonial reorientation of higher education*; as well as the contemporary *landscape of inherited injustice* in its many forms; the environmental, political, economic and religious contours of a *reparative global and regional future* (2021); and the endemic nature of *White supremacy in our regional modernities* in Iran, India, and Pakistan (2022). In 2023, our conference investigated the urgent question of the *ethical and spiritual aspects of the Islamic tradition* that are increasingly repressed – as in other religious traditions – thanks to the widespread distortion of religion by resurgent, hypermodern nationalisms, as well as the commercialization of religion.

All Interdisciplinary Majors

Habib University's programs cut across conventional disciplines to curate powerful undergraduate majors that embody our reparative mission and values

Yet another unique feature of Habib University is the interdisciplinary nature of literally *all* of our degree programs, whether they are in the Dhanani School of Science & Engineering (DSSE), or in the School of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences (AHSS). In the former, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Computer Engineering, and Integrated Sciences & Mathematics (iSciM) are all interdisciplinary programs, with the additional trans-disciplinarity of the Habib Liberal Core Curriculum. In AHSS, Communication & Design, Social Development & Policy, and Comparative Humanities are again self-evidently interdisciplinary programs.

Habib's exclusively interdisciplinary programs are another powerful expression of our reparative commitment to holistic education against the fragmentation of knowledge in modern times, as well as its irrelevance to an understanding of contemporary reality. Only an interdisciplinary education can hope to grasp complex contemporary problems and devise their resolution.

Electrical & Computer Engineering

At Habib University, the inclusion of engineering is not merely the addition of a technical discipline; it reflects our commitment to integrating all domains of knowledge in service of humanity's highest needs. Our Electrical and Computer Engineering programs are designed to foster a reparative lens, instilling in future engineers a deep sense of responsibility for the impact their work has on the world. Engineers have historically shaped our physical and technological landscapes, and now, more than ever, they must contribute to reshaping these systems for the common good.



Our rigorous, multidisciplinary academic experience is crafted as a toolkit for graduates to make positive contributions both locally and globally. We emphasize not only how to solve complex technical problems but also how to critically reflect on *which* problems are most worth solving in a rapidly evolving, interconnected world. As systems become increasingly integrated – merging people, institutions, and technologies – engineers must take on leadership roles in designing and managing complex systems that respond to human needs and emotions.

In response to the fluidity between disciplines, our program encourages exploration across various domains within and beyond engineering. Electrical Engineering students study key areas such as Electronics, Communication, Power, Control, and Embedded Systems, while Computer Engineering students focus on Software Design, Computer Systems, Embedded Systems, Networking, and Information Systems. Both programs offer students the freedom to explore additional fields through electives, and interdisciplinary projects are actively encouraged, often crossing traditional boundaries to foster innovation at the intersection of multiple fields.

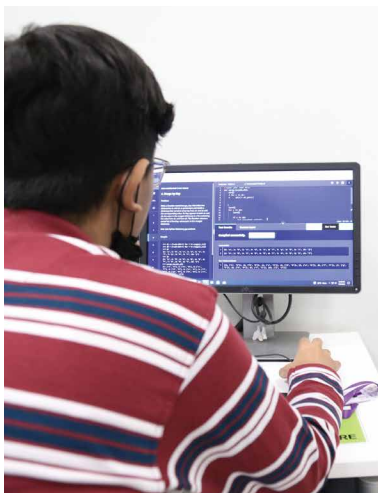
Recognizing that successful engineering must remain connected to human and societal challenges, we elevate design as a core pillar of the educational experience. From the first year onward, students engage with human-centered design, systems thinking, and sustainability frameworks, applying these to real-world challenges. Systems thinking, in particular, enables students to understand the broader implications of their work and the interconnectedness of the systems they help create.

Furthermore, our commitment to sustainability ensures that graduates are equipped to develop solutions that meet the needs of the present without compromising the future. The curriculum emphasizes the cultivation of foundational skills, critical thinking, and adaptability, rather than tool-dependent education. Through problem-based, project-based, and hands-on learning, students develop the capacity to integrate knowledge across domains, preparing them to be visionary designers, thinkers, and problem-solvers in a rapidly changing world.

Computer Science

The Computer Science (CS) program, grounded in the liberal arts, develops students' technical expertise while deepening their understanding of societal complexities. It cultivates two complementary types of thinkers: theoretical computer scientists, who push the boundaries of computation with innovative approaches, and practical computer scientists, who translate these theoretical advancements into real-world applications across diverse fields such as medicine, finance, and the arts.

The program's learning outcomes emphasize this dual focus by integrating both theoretical and practical aspects of computer science with interdisciplinary perspectives. It offers a wide range of electives that allow students to explore specialized areas of interest. At the same time, students are trained to apply design thinking to create impactful ideas and to implement them with a strong sense of social and ethical responsibility.



Through opportunities like *Khidmat* (a social internship) and *Kaavish* (final-year capstone projects), students collaborate with social organizations and industry, leveraging their skills to make meaningful contributions. Additionally, initiatives such as ‘Women in Computer Science and Engineering’ (WiCSE) and platforms like the ‘Undergraduate Research Symposium’ (DURS) foster inclusivity, and help students connect with a diverse community. These measures are a testament to Habib’s CS Program upholding its *Yohsin* values while encouraging students to attain a transdisciplinary education in a diverse community.

Integrated Sciences & Mathematics

An excellent reflection of Habib’s mission is found in its globally acclaimed Liberal Core and its focus on seven *Forms of Thought*. Two of these forms: Quantitative Reasoning, and Natural Scientific Method & Analysis are most relevant to the function of Integrated Sciences & Mathematics (iSciM) in providing a strong Liberal Arts education at Habib. Consequently, iSciM offers both courses that fulfil Liberal Core requirements directly, as well as courses that develop the students’ skills and understanding in these areas much further if students are interested.



In keeping with Habib's liberal arts focus, iSciM is dedicated to offering courses that connect different disciplines, rather than encourage a retreat into narrow disciplinary silos that much of modern education (especially in the natural sciences and mathematics) tends to encourage. As such we encourage collaborations with other disciplines and offer courses that are regularly cross-listed, connecting fields as diverse, for instance, as 'Mathematics and Philosophy', 'Biology and Social Policy', and 'Ethics and Artificial Intelligence'. We are dedicated to providing more such interdisciplinary courses in the future.

A particularly significant focus of our program is on educating students on knowledge relevant to current issues such as climate change and the destruction of the environment, as well as the steps that can be taken to improve the world of the future given our resources and constraints. The reparative focus of such courses is one in which one learns not only what technical solutions may be possible in such cases, but also helps students weed out substantial disinformation that exists on scientific issues in the public sphere and form reasonable opinions on such topics.

Social Development & Policy

The Social Development and Policy (SDP) program at Habib University aligns deeply with the University's mission by embracing the noble pursuit of knowledge for the sake of truth and the good, rather than for profit. SDP is a degree program that cultivates social responsibility. It reflects the university's mission by offering an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and addressing complex social, economic, and political challenges. It emphasizes the importance of knowledge as a tool for positive social change, rather than a commodity.

The SDP program is designed to cultivate an ethos of care and a deep sense of principles that resonate with Habib University's philosophy of *Yohsin*. By integrating theoretical knowledge with practical and hands-on experience, the program equips students with research skills for real-world problems and fosters a lifelong passion for learning, empathy, and social justice.

The program's focus on interdisciplinary learning, and its commitment to addressing issues of development and social change from multiple perspectives, reflects Habib University's dedication to excellence. The program draws on a wide range of disciplines including anthropology, economics, political science, language, and sociology, in an all-inclusive effort to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the forces that shape our world. This broad-based approach is essential for fostering critical thinking and analytical skills, which are vital for understanding the human condition in the Anthropocene and building a reparative future.



The SDP program is nurturing a new generation of social scientists and development practitioners who are not only well-versed in the theories and methods of their disciplines but are also deeply committed to ethical practices and social justice. SDP students are certified in human-subjects research, and are taught to incorporate lived experience, and vernacular sensibilities into human-centered policy design. This careful curation highlights the SDP program's role in advancing the noble enterprise of knowledge for the good of society, clearly echoing the university's mission. SDP students are a community of learners committed to service for the betterment of both society, and professionalism.

Communication & Design

Within the school of Arts and Humanities, the Communications and Design (CND) program holds a unique role. We are the program concerned with the creation and execution of many of Habib's theoretical and philosophical concerns. While our students study historical movements, theoretical approaches, and debate the place of Pakistan in the global landscape, informed by their rigorous Liberal Core classes, we also are tasked with *creating* projects that engage with the *Forms of Thought* that informs the Habib experience.



Students in the CND program choose to specialize in one of our two tracks, that is ‘Communication’, or ‘Design’, delving deeply into their specialties to produce work that tackles problems of local and international concern, elevate awareness on challenges within society, and create works of beauty, innovation, and unique voice. They may make documentaries or feature films, do reportage from Karachi and beyond, or design applications or awareness campaigns – all of these are possible within our department.

In a world where education is increasingly commodified, the arts, artistic expression, and creativity, are often sidelined, if not outright devalued. But art tells us who we are and shows us what we can become. It illuminates our values and our history, putting them to work for our future. And it has many diverse forms. Film, poetry, journalism, illustration, painting, games, documentaries, and even app design are all expressions of the modern world. The values of Habib University and its mission to move beyond a transactional, empty educational model are deeply reflected within the beauty and necessity of a program like Communications and Design.

Comparative Humanities

The Program in Comparative Humanities aspires to nurture in students the capacity for transdisciplinary inquiry and research. Our areas of academic concentration and minors include *history*, *literature*, *philosophy*, *religion*, and *music*. The approach to the humanities disciplines is critical, in at least two ways in which critical thought is understood in the humanities. In one sense, the emphasis is on bringing genres, approaches, ideas, and thinkers into a critical conversation and dialogue across periods of time. In another sense, the emphasis is on critique, as in learning how to think analytically and critically about major figures and bodies of work from postcolonial, feminist, and poststructuralist viewpoints.

Defining and enacting a specifically postcolonial framing and framework is an aspiration in many of the courses taught from the program platform, including the humanities related courses that are part of the university's liberal core curriculum. The postcolonial framing can also be found in the positioning of music courses in the milieu of *hindustani sangeet*. In teaching students to move fluidly across disciplines, we aim to cultivate not only depth and breadth, but an intellectual mindset attuned to the shared problems we face today as global citizens. The Anthropocene, as an intellectual problem or problematic, is the subject of elective courses in the areas of philosophy, literature, and history, and our students are learning to generate theory and contribute to the intellectual debates surrounding the Anthropocene problematic. Comparative Humanities challenges students to reflect on a range of theories about human nature and society – drawing from diverse cultures, traditions, and histories – and in doing so heighten their sensitivity to the way our institutional value of *Yohsin* provides an essential point of reference for thinking about concepts such as ethics, self, identity, obligation, community, and nation.



Students majoring in Comparative Humanities take courses in a program core curriculum that is grounded in interpretive practices that are reparative and affirmative. Reparative interpretation requires applications that take affirmative step towards giving new life to concepts, affects, arguments, images, or tropes, aimed towards addressing problems in the cross-disciplinary humanities, which are problems that are simultaneously problems of the academy and of the world outside the academy. This emphasis on reparative interpretation runs through the core curriculum, as students take courses that are designed to progressively deepen the capacity to understand, create, and apply models of inquiry and debate in the humanities.

The program core courses on public intellectuals, ethics of disagreement, and mechanisms of leadership and authority, are designed to help students make sense of the ways in which a humanities education can be mobilized to bring about epistemic repair in society and politics.

The program sequence leads up to a 400-level senior capstone seminar and a senior year thesis seminar, premised on affirmative and comparative interpretation, which challenge students to define a compelling problem, project, or line of inquiry that requires extended critical analysis and working with several texts, traditions, or disciplines in conversation. The capstone research seminar and senior year thesis independent study is meant to be an interrogative and reparative foray into a focal theme (such as etymological thinking, or violence), central thinker, key work, major figure, influential religious movement, school, or doctrine.

Theorizations in the field of epistemology are also central to the program curriculum, and students take up epistemological questions in program core courses and courses dealing with issues of methodology in the various concentrations and minors. The program therefore aspires to cultivate awareness about the theoretical basis of knowledge and knowledge production, and the ability to engage in productive dialogue about different paradigms of knowledge production, including paradigms in science and the artistic disciplines. Across the program curriculum, the exploration of theory in epistemology is closely linked with theorizations in ontology, thus yielding a curriculum that compels students to articulate insights in an academic field premised on current and ongoing questions of the foundations of both knowledge and reality.

CPAC (Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment, Community)

Unpacking the CPAC Model

At Habib University, we aspire to shape the future of individuals who are deeply engaged in thoughtful self-cultivation (*yohsin*). We envision creating both curricular and co-curricular experiences that challenge students to engage in critical inquiry of past and present, ask critical questions of the contemporary world in all its complexity, and reflect on their role in addressing its fractures. We aim to encourage students to actively contribute to the betterment of society through thought, dialogue, advocacy, innovation, and action. Unlike traditional educational models that often prioritize vocational training alone, the CPAC model aspires to foster critical reflection and deep intellectual engagement, aligning our educational practices with the noble pursuit of knowledge, and the cultivation of individuals committed to the common good.

Content

Content is not merely presented as static or disconnected from students' lived experiences. Instead, we aspire to design and curate content that is both contextually relevant and intellectually rigorous, drawing from diverse epistemologies or forms of thought, and rooted in both local and global contexts. This approach aligns with our vision of a postcolonial liberal arts ethos, where content serves as a tool for imagining a different world, rather than as mere information transfer.

By exposing students to academic and cultural texts, case studies and audio-visual material that challenge dominant paradigms, immersing them in experiential learning that demands deep engagement with diverse communities, and fostering interdisciplinary thinking, we hope to create a learning environment that critically interrogates assumptions and nurtures reflective and critical thinkers.

Pedagogy

At Habib University, we aspire to embrace a pedagogy that reflects a holistic and transformative approach to education. Our vision for teaching moves beyond traditional, rigid, instructor-centered methodologies to a learner-centered approach that promotes curiosity and the act of questioning. In this aspirational model, pedagogy is designed to be fluid and responsive to learners' needs, encouraging students to engage deeply with the material and with each other. We seek to foster an environment where students are not passive recipients of information, but active participants in the learning process. This involves integrating modern teaching practices (such as: collaborative learning, design thinking, project-based learning, case studies, field work, discussion, experiential learning) where students learn by doing, and continuously assess and refine their understanding.

We aim to create a learning environment that is not only intellectually rigorous, but also ethically grounded. Our pedagogical approach prioritizes dialogue and collaboration, allowing students to explore multiple perspectives and develop a sense of responsibility towards each other and the communities they engage with through upholding safe and brave spaces.

Assessment

In conventional educational systems, assessment often prioritizes memorization and standardization. In contrast, we aspire to reimagine assessment within the CPAC model as a reflective and creative process, where the expression of ideas takes precedence. Our ideal approach to assessment would be inclusive and transparent, employing varied methods that align with course learning outcomes and provide students with clear criteria for success. Feedback would be integral, fostering continuous improvement, and encouraging the production of original and impactful work. This reimagined approach to assessment would support our broader mission, where assessment becomes a means of cultivating research skills and immersing oneself in the process of creation.

Community

Traditional education typically confines learning within the boundaries of the classroom. We envision the CPAC model as transcending these limitations by fostering a vibrant learning community that engages with broader socio-cultural spaces. This approach reflects our aspiration to cultivate a thoughtful, generous world. We aim to emphasize collaboration, inclusivity, and student autonomy and voice, ensuring that education extends beyond knowledge-acquisition to the formation of a community of learners committed to ethical action. By facilitating connections with thought leaders and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, we hope to create a learning environment that is critically engaged, hopeful, and forward-thinking in an ethical way. The goal of all classroom experiences would be to inspire students to share their learning with society in tangible actions, whether through social media engagement, community outreach, or the creation of thought-provoking projects. These actions should result through intrinsic motivation, rather than through merely external rewards such as scores or grades.

KUNJI
KEYWORDS

FOR THE HABIB UNIVERSITY MISSION



Anthropocene

The ‘Anthropocene’ literally means ‘the human age’. The extraordinary significance of this term comes from the fact that it refers not to *human* history, but to the current period of *geological* history: i.e., the ‘Anthropocene’ is the current *geological age*. The term ‘Anthropocene’, then, tells us that for the first time in the history of the Earth, a species – the human – has become responsible for the transformation of our entire planet. And this fact – which is *like no other fact in human history* – is literally and increasingly palpable to us with every passing year: we feel it on our skins, for example, in the rising, often unbearable heat of our summers, and experience it in the terrible and accelerating loss of biodiversity in our own brief lifetimes (from insects, to birds, to frogs, to speak only of our urban environment). As Kamil Khan Mumtaz pointed out in his convocation speech at Habib University (2024), an astounding 80% of the species of the Earth have disappeared. If these other creatures of God can vanish – as a result of our own actions – so can we. And even if we don’t, speaking entirely hypothetically, what kind of life would it be without these our creaturely companions on Earth, who charm and inspire us with wonder and affection from our earliest childhood?

To understand the full significance of the ‘Anthropocene’, one must know that the Earth is around four-and-a-half (4.5) billions years old, and has passed through many different phases in the vast history of the continuous movement and interaction of its elements.

The immense timescale of *geological* history is, thus, unimaginably larger than *human* history. For example, we all know that the Prophet Issa/Jesus physically existed 2,000 years ago, which for us is ancient history – but in fact, it is only 0.000044% of Earth history. This means that if *all* of Earth history were compressed into *one whole year*, Jesus would have been here just *14 seconds* ago! Even if we take all of *human* history and prehistory – over 300,000 years – this would constitute 0.067% of Earth history, or if all of Earth history was *one whole year*, humans would have appeared just *35 mins* ago. Clearly, the ‘Anthropocene’ demands that we radically readjust the frame in which we see the significance of this time of our lives.

So, when did the ‘Anthropocene’ begin? The Nobel Prize winning meteorologist and atmospheric chemist, Paul J. Crutzen, who recommended the name for this new geological age, “proposed a starting date for this new era of 1784, the year that James Watt patented the steam engine, symbolic of the start of the industrial revolution and the ‘carbonification’ of our atmosphere by the burning of coal”.² This means that the ‘Anthropocene’ began just 240 years ago – that is, if Earth history were one whole year, the ‘Anthropocene’ began about 1.5 seconds ago: the blink of an eye. Most importantly for us, the ‘Anthropocene’ coincides with the *modern age*.

² Christophe Bonneuil and Jean Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us* (2016).

Finally, a very important point to note is that the ‘Anthropocene’ should not be taken to mean that *all* human beings are responsible for the Earth crisis. To begin with, since it began only in the *modern* period it is *modern* human beings who are responsible for this crisis – which is why the ‘Anthropocene’ has been called instead, the ‘Modernocene’. Furthermore, the vast majority of human beings living simple subsistence lives even in the modern period, have been far from responsible for our collective crisis – indeed, they have been its victims, which is why many call it the ‘Capitalocene’, referring to the modern economic system based on endless accumulation and consumption, and those who drive this system and benefit from it.

Virtually no part of the Earth remains unaffected by the ‘Anthropocene’ – this very brief period of human history has devastated the land, the oceans, the atmosphere, and all the creatures that live in and on them, from the birds that soar in our skies, to the animal and plant life in the deepest depths of the seas.

Colonialism and the Post-Colonial



Humans have been moving around the Earth virtually since they came into existence hundreds of thousands of years ago. Some of this movement and settlement were also accompanied by some violence. Then, about 12,000 years ago – in the geological age immediately preceding the ‘Anthropocene’, when the glaciers of the Earth retreated to create a relatively warmer climate during the ‘Holocene’, the geological period in which all of *recorded* human history came to pass – the rise of agriculture gradually allowed for the creation of more complex and hierarchical societies, resulting also in a relative increase in violence and exploitation, especially when some of these agricultural societies subsequently also became *imperial* societies.

The term ‘colonialism’, however, refers *exclusively* to the colonial and imperial ventures of *modern European nations*. This is for a number of reasons:

1. the historically unprecedented, *systematic extermination of indigenous peoples* in the hundreds of millions across the planet;
2. the specifically *national* and *racial* character of modern European imperialisms, colonization, and slavery – since premodern empires were not national or racial, but *dynastic empires*: thus, eg, *Saltanat-e-Taimuria* (the Empire of the dynasty of Taimur), *Saltanat-e-Usmaniya* (the Empire of the dynasty of Usman I, i.e. the Ottoman Empire), *Salatanat-e-Abbasia* (the Empire of the dynasty of Abbas) – as opposed to the Spanish Empire, the British Empire, the French Empire, etc, which are all modern *national empires*.

3. whereas the primary goal of premodern agricultural empires was limited conquest and rule, with relatively limited accumulation and consumption – the goal of modern European national and racial empires and colonies was total conquest and limitless and progressive capitalist accumulation and consumption, obviously devastating for societies, peoples and nature;
4. whereas prejudice in premodern empires was limited to the relatively small ruling class of the royal family and their associates and officers, and was largely limited to their regional class and caste prejudices, the modern European ruling class encompassed the entire imperial nation – and evinced not only a fierce sense of modern racial superiority in this massive national ruling class (systematically subordinating entire nations to entire nations); but together with that national-racial superiority, a unique modern sense of historical superiority, meaning that only White people, only Europeans belonged in modern times, while non-European, non-White, non-modern peoples belonged to the past, that is, they did not even belong in the very time in which they lived and were, therefore, destined for extinction and to be replaced by White people, a view widely prevalent well into the 20th century: racial and historical superiority were, thus, united in the modern doctrine of *national Progress*;
5. whereas precolonial, premodern empires and states had limited means of both knowledge, technology and ambition to govern and penetrate their subject populations, modern

European empires and states built *vast bodies of racist knowledges, and extensive and sophisticated technologies to subjugate and transform peoples*, violently distorting and devastating their inheritance and self-understanding, and tearing them apart.

Modern colonialism has hence been the most violent, unequal, divisive and destructive period in human history. All the peoples of the world – including the colonizers, since they too were naturally transformed by their own terrible actions, as can be seen in our own times in Israel, eg, where modern Zionism has completely transformed the Jewish people – bear the massive trauma of these awful centuries, and are very far from having recovered from this hellish period in human and planetary history. Indeed, it appears we are being pushed deeper into it with renewed force, now with our own full involvement in our own and the planet's destruction.

'Postcolonial', then, has two sets of meanings. On the one hand, 'postcolonial' refers to the *effects* of this unprecedented modern historical experience of planetary colonialism: it does not mean 'after colonialism has been left behind', but rather refers to the world created by colonialism, *in the wake of colonialism*. On the other hand, 'postcolonial' thought also refers to the work of *recognizing the reality of this modern colonial inheritance, and imagining and bringing into existence a world beyond this terrible modern inheritance and the world it has created* – rather than sinking ever deeper into its abyss, ever closer to planetary annihilation and extinction.



Epistemology

‘Epistemology’ means ‘having to do with knowledge’. There are many different forms of knowledge, and many different ways of approaching and understanding knowledge. For example, whereas modern ‘philosophy’ is largely a *purely academic and professional* enterprise, with *no necessary connection to the art of living*, philosophy in the past was first of all, a *way of life*. Its etymology itself refers us to this difference: *philo-* “loving” + *sophia* “wisdom” – and *wisdom* necessarily implies a *well-lived knowledge, a knowledge that teaches you to live well*. These are, then, two very different ways of understanding and knowing philosophy – i.e., two different *epistemologies* of philosophy.

Another example might be that whereas many peoples believe all of creation to be imbued with spirit (inspired), we moderns make the distinction between organic and inorganic matter, and have a very exclusively human-centred understanding of ‘spirit’. Hence these are two different ways of knowing ‘nature’ – two different *epistemologies* of nature.

The term ‘epistemology’ implies that even before we investigate and acquire knowledge, our *approach* is determined by certain assumptions *about* knowledge. In the modern period, for example, only ‘natural science’ has come to be understood as real knowledge, whereas in the past ‘science’ implied a vast spectrum of equally legitimate forms of knowledge. This is evident in the fact that in English the word ‘knowledges’ seems to be ungrammatical – as if ‘knowledge’ is necessarily singular – whereas there is no such problem in going from علم (*ilm*) to علوم (*ulum*). Again: two different ways of knowing knowledge – two different *epistemologies* of knowledge.

Yet another example: even though both the *modern* disciplines of ‘sociology’ and ‘anthropology’ are about the study of human societies, they are two separate forms of knowledge. Why is this the case? Because ‘sociology’ is the study of ‘modern societies’ (i.e., White, European, modern societies), and ‘anthropology’ is the study of ‘traditional societies’ (non-White, non-European, non-modern) – as if these were two different species! Relatedly, when the word ‘culture’ is used for White, European, modern societies, it refers to a dynamic ‘high culture’ (books, paintings, architecture, etc), but when ‘culture’ is used in the context of non-White, non-European, non-modern societies, it refers to static customs, rules, ‘superstitions’, etc. Again: *racist epistemology*.

The term ‘epistemology’ means that knowledge comes together with an entire orientation.



Inter- and transdisciplinarity

Virtually all the departments and disciplines taught in universities are *modern*, whether in the ‘natural sciences’, in ‘STEM’, in the ‘humanities’, or in the ‘social sciences’ (all of which are themselves *modern* divisions of knowledge): thus, anthropology, sociology, history, engineering, biology, economics, etc, are all *modern* disciplines and forms of knowledge. The modern period is, in fact, a period of the great fragmentation of knowledge.

But reality is not divided in this way: in reality, culture does not exist apart from society, which does not exist apart from history, which does not exist apart from the economy, which does not exist apart from technology, and so on and on. This is just as true *within* the large modern divisions of knowledge – ‘humanities’, ‘social sciences’, ‘STEM’ – as it is *between* them. For example, you cannot have a good engineer – let alone one who is a leader in their field – who has no understanding of society, or culture, or economics, or even history.

Therefore, to properly approach reality, we need to *combine* the disciplines – which is called ‘interdisciplinarity’ – or indeed even *go beyond them*, which is called ‘transdisciplinarity’.



Liberal Arts

A 'liberal arts' education is distinguished from vocational training. It implies an expansive education that includes in its curriculum a range of courses from across the modern divisions of knowledge, i.e. the natural sciences, the social sciences, the humanities and the arts. The aim of such an education is holistic, motivated by the development of the entire personality and potential of the student. Such an expansive education is aimed at the formation of free citizens, competent to participate in discussion and deliberation about the vital issues of their world and time, simultaneously developing the leadership potential of the individual.



Nation-State and Nationalism

It is commonly thought that the nation-state emerged with the French Revolution (1789), when the *state* came to represent the *people* – rather than the monarch. This is, however, false. The modern nation-state came into existence not from below, by the efforts of ordinary people – but from above at the hands of modern European absolutist monarchs during the Renaissance/Reformation and Enlightenment. The easiest way to understand this is to ask why so many modern European monarchs are called ‘Great’ by modern European peoples? ‘Isabella the Great’ (15th century: Renaissance Spain), ‘Elizabeth the Great’ (16th century: Renaissance England), ‘Louis the Great’ (17th century: ‘Enlightenment’ France), ‘Frederick the Great’ (18th century: ‘Enlightenment’ Germany), ‘Peter the Great’ (late 17th/early 18th century: ‘Enlightenment’ Russia) – what makes all these modern despotic and absolutist monarchs great? The answer is obvious: with their unprecedented modern power, they created these modern European nations. Even in the postcolonial world, there are various ‘fathers’ of ‘the nation’ – Jinnah, Gandhi, Mujibur Rahman, etc – because they created the nation and hence the nation-state.

There are many features that distinguish the ‘modern’ nation from communities of the past: a territory with clear borders; a single ‘national’ language, together with a single ‘national’ religion; a standing ‘national’ army and a massive ‘national’ police force, among others.

Modern nationalism and the creation of the nation-state have resulted in terrible ethnic cleansing, civil wars, and national wars – all of which mobilize entire populations for violence unlike any other period in human history.

Reparation (Epistemic Reparation)

Habib University's educational mission has increasingly come to be defined as *reparative*. This refers, first of all, to the *repairing*, or *healing* function of our programs – first of all, our Habib Liberal Core Curriculum, which seeks to heal our ailing perspective on the world, whose symptoms are confusion, conflict, and cynicism. It is also about healing our deeply wounded inheritance, wounded by the modern racist knowledges of both colonialism and nationalism. This is what we also call 'epistemic reparation' (see epistemology above) – healing both our knowledges and our approach to knowledge.

When a disease is at a critical stage, however, healing and reparation often require surgery before medicine can be effective. Thus, *What is Modernity?* and PAMSA both require the deep uprooting and unlearning of widely held assumptions among literate modern people. Such uprooting and unlearning are, like surgery, often very painful processes, even as they are deeply rewarding in the end. *Hikma* also requires deep unlearning – even as it provides the concepts and resources for spiritual insight, renewal, replenishment and growth.

We also have plans for developing a final course in the Habib Liberal Core titled, '*Reparative Futures*', which will include, for example, modules on global 'degrowth', an approach to the economy increasingly recommended by thinkers across the world as necessary to healing our world so deeply wounded by the modern cancer of 'growth', which is literally eating away at the very sources of life on the planet, as well as sucking the life out of our communities and societies, making existence lonely and miserable, even – or perhaps especially – in the midst of so-called 'prosperity' in the most supposedly 'advanced' societies of the world.



Yohsin

The insight that grounds our liberal arts program is, in fact, the motto of Habib University, which drives our overall educational mission and operations across our campus and beyond. As referenced above, research shows that the primary factor behind the lasting success of a higher-educational venture is a sense of mission. Habib University's unique educational mission is driven by the noble and inspiring motto, which is also the basis of our bold trademark, *Shaping Futures: قِيمَةُ كُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا يُحْسِنُهُ* (*qimatu kulli imri ma yohsinahu*) – 'the worth of every human is in their *thoughtful self-cultivation*' – the magical key to transforming, shaping and empowering the individual, and the world. Proudly drawn and translated from our Islamic spiritual and sapiential heritage, our choice of motto goes far beyond any merely symbolic gesture, in the commanding depth and luminosity of its vision for the human and our potential: pure of all the despair, cynicism, darkness and misanthropy so widespread today.

This vibrantly radiant aphorism – including especially its luminous and pulsating heart, the word 'yohsin' – plays the role of a guiding star at Habib across its various departments and offices, so it is important to understand its multiple dimensions and implications.

In the widely available Urdu translation of Islam's preeminent sage after the Prophet Muhammad (saw) – from whom wisdom traditions have been disseminated across sects, throughout the Islamic world and civilization – Imam Ali's (as) renowned discourses, *Nahj-ul-balagha* (*Limit of Eloquence/Wisdom*), this saying is translated simply as, "the worth of every human is in their 'ہنر' (*hunar*: particular craft, or skill)". The saying, however, as well as the specific word, *yohsin*, are much richer and more suggestive than this translation offers, and deserve our attention and analysis.

To begin with, the Arabic saying specifically uses the word 'امری' (*imri*) for the human – rather than, say, the more familiar 'انسان' (*insan*) or 'بشر' (*bashr*), each of which have their own specific connotations: the former suggesting the human in its sociability and intimacy (from 'انس' [*uns*]), the latter indicating the propitious, even prophetic character of the human. 'Imri' derives from 'مرا' (*mara'a*), which indicates wholesomeness and health, thus suggesting the human as salubrious. One could be forgiven, however, for first thinking that 'امری' is related to 'امر' (*amr*, order or command), since it shares the first three letters. Indeed, such multiple possibilities and connections of letters, words, roots and meanings were continually present in the minds of the most adept and skillful practitioners of the extraordinary Arabic language – none more so than the most eloquent and wise Imam – who regularly take advantage of them to amplify the force, depth and potential of their eloquence.

If, then, we allow here such a connection between ‘امري’ (*imri*) and ‘امر’ (*amr*) – even if the mainstream linguistic sciences might not – this would further suggest the human in our commanding, or imperative aspect: the fact that in and through our actions, we each as it were, will the creation of a particular kind of order – the fact that we have a *significant* impact on the world, setting a personal example and imposing a particular direction and shape on its order.

Even more significantly, the word ‘*yohsin*’ stems from ‘*husn*’, which has strong connotations of (ethical) beauty or grace, and is also the root of the noble words ‘*absan*’ (excellent, or exalted), as well as ‘*ihsan*’ (favour, or generosity), thus these senses also resonate in it. This is why we derive our guiding values of grace, excellence, respect, service, and passion from ‘*yohsin*’ (passion because where there is beauty, generosity and excellence, love and passion are necessarily at work). It is telling of a larger significance, to note here that these expansive and lofty resonances of the Arabic word ‘*husn*’ are all but identical to the elevating senses that reverberate in the Greek word ‘*kalon*’: which simultaneously signifies ‘beautiful’, ‘good’, ‘noble’, or ‘fine’ – as dazzlingly illuminated in multiple dialogues of Plato, a philosopher to whom many Muslims took like bees to nectar.

But how do we get from there to *thoughtful self-cultivation*? ‘Yohsin’ is a verb – that is, it is an activity: an activity that produces the qualities of grace, service, passion and excellence. What can such activity be, but ‘thoughtful self-cultivation’? This translation of *yohsin* indicates the loving labour of graceful self-transformation and elevation of stature, that is deliberate and generously inclined towards others and the world – thus contributing also to the creation of a beautiful, reparative order in the world.

The Imam’s exalted aspiration for the human here, reflects also the Prophet’s awe-inspiring directive, demanding of mortals an impossible ascension: ‘تخلقوا بأخلاق الله’ – ‘cultivate the ethos of the God’: the very God who, he tells us in another lustrous *hadith*, is ‘beautiful and loves beauty’ (إِنَّ اللَّهَ جَمِيلٌ يُحِبُّ الْجَمَالَ), at once an arresting definition of, and a powerful glimpse into the nature and ethos of Divinity (resonating, of course, with the theme of beauty in our own motto). *Yohsin* instructively translates the Prophet’s imposing words, measuring them for our secular imagination and regular application: our thoughtful self-cultivation.

To elaborate further, if we now take the first derivation of *imri* (from *mara’a*), the saying suggests that in so far as the human is a wholesome, healthy being, our worth lies in the extent to which we thoughtfully cultivate ourselves – that is, in the measure of beauty, generosity and excellence our specific activity brings forth in the world, thus healing and replenishing it. This is how we realize our distinctively human potential in the world: what makes each of us humans worthy of our salubrious name, ‘*imri*’.

If we allow the relation of *imri* to *amr* (remember that ‘i’ and ‘a’ here – the first letters of the two words, respectively – are the same Arabic letter, *aleph*), then another reason that the Imam might have chosen the word ‘*imri*’ for the human in this saying also suggests itself: In our being and activity in the world – which is always impactful, setting an example to others and shaping the world in a certain direction, imposing a particular order around us – we must strive to create a beautiful world, a world that is full of grace and generosity, an exalted and excellent world. In the midst of all that is ugly and wrong in the world, this is what it means to repair and heal it, what it means to strive to create a beautiful and generous, wholesome and salubrious, reparative order – and this is necessarily a highly aware, reflective activity: requiring on our part, thoughtful self-cultivation. Again, this is what makes each of us humans worthy of our commanding name, ‘*imri*’ (this time, conjecturally of course) – what it means to appropriately and authentically exercise the commanding power we have each been gifted by the Creator, as His quirky creature ‘*imri*’.

Given all of the above, it may not be hyperbole to venture that, if there is any meaning at all in what is today often thought to be a meaningless world, what else can it be but this: *yohsin* – thoughtful self-cultivation? *Yohsin* is a teaching at once ‘secular’ – since it is, in any case, a maxim perfect for inspired and salubrious action in this world – and ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’: since it at once carries the promise of salvation in the next.

Note that even if we were to take the more common translation of 'yohsin' as 'hunar' – the special craft or skill you bring to the world – all of the above would still resonate in it. That is, in whatever profession you choose, such thoughtful self-cultivation of grace, respect, service, and passion is what would impel you to excellence in your work.

The Imam is precisely known for such breviloquence, avoiding all patter, platitude and pomp – as is his master, the Prophet, as well as the other Imams and the exalted women from the Prophet's nurturing household, such as the Ladies Fatima and Zainab – all known for their mastery of, as we say in Urdu, the art of *darya ko kuzay mein band karna*, 'capturing a river in a cup' (only, this river flows from the heavens through the Earth). They propitiously measure every word they utter to maximally disclose its indicative potential – turning every phoneme (unit of sound) into a luminous and radiant sememe (unit of meaning) – expressing themselves in compactly eloquent, compelling and restorative sayings that are full of reflective potential, that is, prophetically full of meaning and insight, a refreshing resource of wisdom and guidance for ages to come, thus exemplifying the extraordinary signifying potential of the human: *bashr* – the human in its propitious and prophetic potential.

Finally, it is important to note that Habib University's decade-long championing of self-cultivation as the goal of education, anticipates current cutting-edge research in the fields of education, the humanities and social sciences and beyond, as a quick google search will readily show. Once again, Habib University has been in the vanguard of higher educational envisioning and transformation. We do add 'thoughtful' to 'self-cultivation' in our translation of *yohsin* – to guard it against a superficially aesthetic self-stylization – thus emphasizing both deliberation, as well as thoughtfulness towards others, since the specific connotations of *husn*, and thus *yohsin*, at once strongly imply such an ethical orientation in the very meaning of 'beauty'.

END NOTE

We trust that “QASD aur KUNJI” has inspired you and provided valuable insights into the profound mission that drives Habib University, unraveling why it stands as a historic, one-of-a-kind institution.

Our President Wasif Rizvi envisions that members of the Habib University community develop a richer understanding of the cultural and intellectual heritage of South Asia, and how it informs the unique context and mission of our liberal arts and sciences institution. This will enable them to cultivate diverse perspectives and effectively integrate these learnings into their work, both within and beyond the University.

Entrusted with this responsibility, the Office of People and Culture took up the challenge of facilitating this mission. The culmination of these efforts is the development of the QASD Program (QASD derived from the Arabic word for "purpose"), reflecting a commitment to advancing Habib University’s unified and enduring intellectual mission.

The publication of “QASD aur KUNJI – The Habib University Mission” is the result of over eight months of dedicated effort that was made possible through close collaboration with our founding faculty members. We are especially grateful to Dr. Nauman Naqvi and Dr. Shah Jamal Alam for their expert guidance and support which were instrumental in shaping “QASD aur KUNJI” into a cohesive narrative.

As we celebrate our 10-year anniversary with the launch of this book and reflect on this milestone, we recognize that this is just the beginning of a much longer path of intellectual growth and exploration. The QASD program will continue to provide a historical understanding and critically examined narratives that foster the development of thoughtful, self-cultivated individuals. We invite you to join us in this ongoing journey of the QASD Program, embracing reparative measures to transform the higher education landscape of Pakistan.

Office of People and Culture

“ I have great admiration for Habib University in the way it has put the liberal arts into operation. What makes Habib University so attractive is the intellectual confidence and the high-quality faculty, that is what gives an institution a bright future. ”

Dr. Alexander Key

*Associate Professor, Comparative Literature, Stanford University
Member, Board of Governors, Habib University*

“ Habib University is a beautiful idea that welcomes everyone. It has the potential to transform not just Pakistan and its economy and human development. But more even: showing that it can be done in a country that's never had a liberal arts institution is going to show that it can be done in many countries around the world, too. ”

Dr. Maria Klawe

Former President, Harvey Mudd College (2006–2023)

“ In the kind of postcolonial [or] decolonial moments, what I understand, the mission of Habib University is really of the utmost importance not just for the people in Pakistan but really for people all over the world. ”

Dr. Oludamini Ogunnaike

Associate Professor, African Religious Thought and Democracy, University of Virginia

“ Qasd aur Kunji is an amazing document — an intellectual tour de force and a truly radical manifesto challenging the very foundations of humanistic traditions in a postcolonial moment for imagining new futures, and even possibilities of survival in the age of extinction. ”

Dr. Ali Usman Qasmi

Associate Professor, Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani School of Humanities and Social Sciences



Habib University
shaping futures

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