Challenge Of Educational Reforms: A Reflection On The Discourse Of Islamisation Of Knowledge

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Abstract

Muslim intellectuals commonly opine that the malaise of Muslim Ummah and the decline of Islamic civilisation is due to the drawbacks in the educational system in the Muslim lands, which need to be addressed. The struggles for educational reforms started long back, and several Muslim scholars put their efforts in this regard. As Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), tried to reconcile between the revelation and reason, and later, in the Subcontinent, Allama Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), among others also put the efforts for that. In the late 1970s, during the Islamic revivalism, it was restarted again when the idea of Islamisation of Knowledge for the educational reforms in Muslim lands was further developed in a broad sense by late Prof. Ismā'il Rajī Al-Fārūqī (d. 1986), in response to what he referred as "the malaise of the Ummah". This article highlights some of the efforts made by Muslim Intellectuals to reform the educational system in Muslim lands, and the contributions made by the Islamisation of Knowledge movement to contemporary Islamic thought will be discussed. Hence, it is also an attempt to evaluate the Islamisation of the knowledge movement. The article argues that there is sufficient room for contribution and improvement in the discourse of the Islamisation of Knowledge, particularly in its methodology. A dialogue between scholars of different civilisations is needed in setting and applying Islamic global norms for a purposeful and beneficial education system for the world.

Keywords: IoK, Islamisation of Knowledge, Educational reforms, Islamic discourse of knowledge, Muslim response to contemporary challenges.

Introduction

When we study the history of the Muslim world, we observe that the Islamic world attained the golden age in the past. That was a time of peace, prosperity, and stability, but the prevailing situation is totally different as Muslims are now suffering political instability, economic deprivation, illiteracy, and social injustice. Many Muslim intellectuals put their efforts into discovering the reasons for this malaise of Muslim Ummah, and they concluded that the modern form of Knowledge causes the contemporary sufferings of the Muslim world and the decline of Islamic civilisation, as the present-day education system is corrupted spiritually, ideologically, and morally. Therefore, it doesn't match the needs of Muslim societies, these sciences and their branches need reforms. Many Muslim scholars put their efforts into the reforms in education and they tried to reconcile between the reason and revelation in the Muslim discourse of Knowledge. This

process continues throughout the ages in the Muslim world.

This article highlights the intellectual endeavour of Muslim philosophers which is known as the discourse of Islamisation of Knowledge. First, it overviews the conditions of the Islamic world in the past and in the present times. The Muslims were leading the world and were the torchbearers in all the fields of human life. But now the situation has totally changed. Therefore, Muslim intellectuals made long efforts to discover the causes behind this decline and to suggest possible measures and solutions for this malaise of Muslim Ummah. Most of the scholars opine that one of the main causes is the problem of knowledge. In the past, it could be found that as early as Imam al-Ghazālī (AH 450-505, 1058-1111 CE), took measures and tried to reconcile the reason and revelation in the Muslim discourse of knowledge. The latest endeavour which highlighted this issue is the movement of Islamisation of Knowledge, which was started in the late 1970s, when the world was experiencing Islamic revivalism.

The Islamisation of knowledge got started when some activists of the Muslim Students Association (MSA), formed another association for the professionals working in the United States of America and Canada with the name of Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS). Later, these associations established, the International Institute of Islamic Thought in USA (IIIT), in 1981, which aimed at the intellectual development of Muslim ummah. The idea of the Islamisation of Knowledge was further developed by late Professor Dr Ismāʿil Rajī Al-Fārūqī (1921-1986), the president at that time of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, Virginia, USA. Islamisation of Knowledge means "to recast the whole legacy of human knowledge from the standpoint of Islam." Different institutes throughout the world took the initiative to give a practical shape to the

discourse of the Islamisation of Knowledge and implement it in the curriculum of educational institutes in the Muslim world. The International Institute of Islamic Thought in Virginia, USA, is a pioneer institute in this field and has branches throughout the Muslim world. The Islamic International University, Malaysia (IIUM) was established on the same idea in 1983, and now IIUM has six campuses and fourteen faculties. It has produced more than seventy thousand graduates from more than a hundred countries. The Islamic International University was established in Pakistan in 1980 and restructured in 1985, with a similar aim to synthesize contemporary sciences and the revealed knowledge.

Historical Evidence

It has been claimed on a broad level that Islam was once known as a reference to several civilisations around the globe. As the Scholars and Intellectuals of the Islamic world were the main contributors to all the major fields of knowledge and sciences, such as mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, religion, and history. The Muslim golden ages were a time of pride and honour for humanity, specifically for Muslims. An all-encompassing overview of the Muslim world and the Islamic civilisation unveils that at the time of its prime and peak, Muslim scholars and intellectuals were leading humanity to its stability and prosperity. Islam, from its very beginning, upraised from a simple religion to a state and continues to establish the greatest civilisation ever. As well as Muslim empire reigned as a superpower in this world for more than five hundred years. There was not any nation that could compete with the Muslim ummah in their achievements in knowledge and wisdom.

At present, the Muslim world which consists of 57 states is gifted with most of the natural and human resources, which play a pivotal role in the development of all countries

of the world. It is stated as a fact that the development and the growth of a nation depend about sixty percent on human resources, twenty-four percent on the availability of natural resources, and about sixteen percent on infrastructure. In the present social, political, and [1] Currently Muslim world represents more than 27% of an estimated world population of seven billion. While Muslims are found on all the five inhabited continents, alongside being the youngest of all other major groups (median age of 24 years old in 2015). Muslim states own seventy-five percent of the total oil reserves in the world, (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Qatar, Libya, Algeria, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, possess almost 66.2 to 75.9 % of total world oil reserves) whereas United States, world's superpower, possess only 2% of total oil reserves, and the western countries have four percent of total oil reserves.[2]

Question Marks

The block of Muslim states, although rich in both human and natural resources, is suffering a bad state of poverty, illiteracy, disorder, turmoil, confusion, and political instability. Mansoor Ali Khan while discussing the conditions of Muslim countries says that the misconducts and cruel manners of the governments, military coups and feudal system and other unethical practices in the different spheres of life and corrupt practices are the main factors which kept Muslim nations to grow on its full potential.[3] Ismā'il Rajī Al-Fārūqī observes that since the start of the fifteenth century, the Islamic civilization got diminishing and declining and in vice versa the western civilization rising had a very serious impact on the thought and psyche of Muslims as well as on the scholars of Islam as all of them demotivated to seek the knowledge. While western society initiated its intellectual uprising with the higher knowledge and research basically which they got from Muslims. He

economic setup of the world, the Muslim world is categorised as low as getting developed or underdeveloped in spite of presence ironic abundance of natural resources on the planet, along with rich human capitals.

further adds that in the current scenario of global village, it becomes more significant for muslims to preserve their cultural specifications to assure the preservation of their identity. For that reason, they need to keep distance and make precautions in obtaining the heinous ideas from West, which ultimately make Muslims aliens in their own societies. He specifically emphasizes on the education as the pirated content from western counterpart destroy the indigenous culture and civilization.[4]

It has been observed that the Western education system is the main reason and the root cause of several crises and violence in this peaceful world. Prof. Muhammad Mumtaz Ali rightly states that it is observable in the contemporary world that the people involved in corruption, unethical practices, and the development and production of mass destruction weapons are highly educated not the illiterate.[5] The question is whether these outcomes match the aims and objectives of the education or contradict the basic learning objectives. Specifically, we can state that these outcomes contradict the targets and goals of Islamic education as the premier international conference on Muslim Education, which was held at Jeddah in 1977, concluded that the primary aim of education must be a balanced upbringing of human personality by training and improving him spiritually, intellectually, rationally and in his bodily senses, etc., i.e. all the aspect of life and it should be individually as well as in their collective life. Besides that, this education should encourage all attributes and characteristics towards goodness and the attainment of perfection. The main objective of

Islamic education is the ontology of total submission to almighty Allah on all the levels.[6]

Evidence for the limited success of the contemporary Western education system even the West is found in a study titled "Excellence without Soul" conducted by Gordon Mckay Professor, Harry R. Lewis, he concludes that the universities overlook their main responsibility for the undergrad students, as these universities are now just focusing only on transferring information to their students, while they do not make any positive changes in these students. They do not effort to make them better human beings. They were responsible for converting a teenager into a grown young man knowing who he is, knowing his life objectives. Their scholarly excellence goes parallel to their life embedded with moral excellence.[7] Further, it has been observed that when we hear the talks of senior directors of higher learning institutes, we find that they are talking mostly about troubles and challenges and about seeking knowledge through hard-working. But seldom do they address the moral values and ethical strengths, such as kindness, integrity, etc., and encourage their students to leave this world as a better world. As bigger the university or institute will be, the more they will be focusing on completeness in markets and fields.[8]

Viable Answers

According to some scholars, the fifteenth century's most important duty of Muslims specifically Islamic scholars is to solve the issues in the educational system. Without this, there is no potential for any actual revival of the Muslim nation. They argued that the present duality in the education system in Muslim societies, i.e. the division into secular and Islamic, is the real cause of the problem. So this bifurcation should be eliminated in Muslim societies.[9] Early efforts, as far back as Imam Al-Ghazālī (AH 455-505/1058-1111 CE), attempted to construct a bridge between reason and

revelation and to bring the entire domain of knowledge back to an Islamic axis. The Islamic scholars and intellectuals throughout the ages, particularly in the modern period, such as Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938 CE) and Muhammad Asad (1900-1992 CE) went further in their attempts to reconcile the conflict between the Western (secular) body of knowledge and the Islamic spirit and to bring both secular knowledge and the religious sciences together in one harmonious system.

According to Amīmul Ihsan, the educational reforms and knowledge purifcation started from the very beginning as Islam appeared, As the first revelation of Prophet Muhammad SAWW was related to knowledge. He states that in a broader view, it can be affirmed that the real Islamisation of knowledge started when the revelation of the Holy Qur'an started to the holy prophet Muhammad (saws). That knowledge was used by the holy prophet (PBUH) to transform the thought process and working behaviours of the society, which ultimately became a strong spiritual foundation of Islamic civilization. Therefore, Islamisation of knowledge plays a significant contribution to the flourishment of nourishing Islamic society. It is known that the most important factor in the growth of Islamic society was its real thrust for the knowledge seeking and establishment of justice and truth for sustainable peace and well-being in the society.[10]

The aim of contemporary knowledge and the secular education system is not in line with the aims of Islamic education. Islamic education is not meant only for Muslims. It is equally meaningful and beneficial for all communities. In the context of Islam, the meaning of Ilm is inherent in the connotations of terms Tarbīyyāh, Talīm and Tadīb taken together, which characterize the scope of education in Islam.[11] Allama Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) also emphasized such kind of

education which serves humanity according to the vision of Islam as he says in his letter to Khawaja Ghulam Syyidain by stating that the term Ilm, is meant for that knowledge which has the basis on senses. That kind of knowledge will produce that physical power which will be subject to the religion of Islam. And the knowledge that does not have such basis and ends is the evil in his words. He further addresses the Muslims by stating that you have to Islamicize the contemporary knowledge and sciences by transforming them subject to the values of Islam.[12]

Another great scholar of contemporary Muslim thought, Tāhā Jābir al-Alwāni, expressed his opinion about contemporary knowledge that it is one-sided being based only on rationality leaving aside the revelation, while Islamic knowledge is more comprehensive in the sense that it takes both, the revelation and rationality as the sources of knowledge. As well as the prevailing knowledge is the product of Western thought and mind, therefore based on their methodologies.[13] According to Sayyid Naquīb al-'Attās value natural knowledge does not exist and always has influences of the society where it was produced and the influencing factors may be religious, moral, or cultural, even if it is not acknowledged. He claims that Western sciences or knowledge do not have any moral norms or values because that knowledge is based on skepticism. He further expressed his observation that Western scientists and philosophers extensively benefited from the knowledge developed by Muslims at the initial stage, but they did not accept the Muslim knowledge in the original form but instead assimilated and shaped that knowledge according to their thought and behaviour.

Maḥmūd A. Ghāzī opines that we have received the contemporary social sciences from the West as these were initiated, established, and developed indeed in Western historical

background, therefore, embedded in a certain European colour and nature in all of their ingredients. This type of knowledge should not be introduced in Muslim societies as they have a different environment from that of Europe. He observed that in European societies when and where the environment required change, they fulfilled that for themselves. He further urges Muslims that a methodology should be developed as per their needs to re-codify, particularly the social sciences as the examples of the Russian and communist world are before us. Communists during their reign rejected all of that stating them as bourgeois sciences and fingered out the need to reproduce all the knowledge according to the ideology of Marx and Lenin. He states that in the last half-century, they have changed all the sciences and made them in harmonious with communist philosophy. The Muslims without any hesitation should follow the communist example and should reconstruct the knowledge based on Islamic ideology."[14]

Al-Attās emphatically asserts that the crux of contemporary problems is "the problem of knowledge." He asserts that the process of disseminating knowledge in the Muslim world must check the infiltration of significant concepts from the modern Western world's concepts which have brought about much confusion and will ultimately generate grave consequences for the Muslim world. He says, "Our task will be first to isolate the elements including the key concepts". These elements and key concepts are not confined only to the social sciences; they have influenced every branch of knowledge including the natural, physical, and applied sciences.[15]

Practical Attempts for Overcoming the Crises

These developments resulted in the form of a movement of Islamisation of knowledge. The proponents of Islamisation believe that modern

knowledge is not neutral, but it reflects Western values and ethos, in contradiction to those who believe that knowledge is neutral and can be applied to any society. It needs reformation within the limits of Islamic principles i.e., knowledge requires Islamisation, to have a knowledge that is fully compliant with Islamic values.

Here, Dr. Al-Fārūqī opines that the Muslims' multidimensional awkwardness can be detached only and only by incorporating both traditional knowledge and modern sciences, and this anticipated incorporation and amalgamation is the task of academics and scholars who have a full grip on Islamic scholarship as well as modern human sciences.[16] The target of this integration is to develop academic textbooks (especially for undergrad and higher studies) encompassing Islamised knowledge is the real core of Islamisation of Knowledge. Inundated in the practices, customs, and traditions, Muslim scholars in work for the Islamisation of Knowledge project capably attempt to apply systematic and scientific approaches in every field of science and provide Islamic intellectual thought and knowledge in such fields.[17]

According to Moneer al-Otabi and Hakim Rashid the vision of Islamisation has provided a most important inducement for the reforms of Islamic education specifically for Muslims. Throughout Islamic circles, educators are debating and discussing methods and techniques of restoring the dominant secular approach with a neutral, balanced approach to Islam fully grounded in the revealed Islamic sciences. One of the essential needs is that these dialogues include the necessity to change the education setup in Muslim lands from a mere imitation of the modern Western model.[18] Therefore, a major focus of both, Otabi and Rashid is on the distinctiveness and particularity of the education system with the needs of the

Islamic world instead of imitation of the western world.

Jafaar Sheikh Idris clarifies that sometimes it is questioned how knowledge can be Islamised, whether in its sense it is not Islamised or something non-Islamic. So, there is a distinction between knowledge and claims to knowledge as well as there are degrees of truth.[19] Many times, it gets puzzled by the claims of knowledge, which in reality do not have any linkage with actual knowledge. The so-called knowledge in the present-day world is not accepted as knowledge except in the atheistic and materialistic philosophy, commonly found in the Western world. He argued that our concepts of different things are influenced by philosophical thoughts like the concepts of truth, evidence, priorities, etc. all are directly inspired by our specific philosophies. As the prevailing philosophy is based on materialism, atheism, and false assumptions. So, we have to replace it with a worldview that is based on truth and right values. We believe, and have the evidence, to show that Islam is such a worldview.[20] However, the real issue falls in our philosophical realm as we are unable to develop an actual Islamic philosophical basis for knowledge and education, which is the real issue to be dealt with in this endeavour.

Islamisation of different disciplines of knowledge is the concept of integrating the basic Islamic universal values into the contemporary education system. In the context of Islamic heritage on shariah, scholars deduced a few essential higher values, which due to their comprehensiveness, practicality, and universality, provide a viable basis for global accord and harmonious interaction among the nations. These primary values and principles have the necessary capability and competence to evolve and develop a system needed in the contemporary period. The foremost value is the Tawhīd, a very basic value and doctrine in

Islamic theological phenomena to believe in the oneness and uniqueness of almighty Allah but here will be meant as the unity in life and cosmos. The second value is 'adl; equity, fairness, justice, moderation, and balance. It is important to note that no socioeconomic structure is capable of functioning effectively if it lacks 'adl; justice, fairness, and moderation, as it is a transcendental and divine value with comprehensive applicability. The next value and principle that plays a very important role in global peaceful and sustainable interactions is the value of the protection and promotion of life (nafs).[21]

The following elementary principle and common shared merit is the safeguard, preservation, and advancement of reason and rational attitude. It stands for policies and decisions to be essentially based on norms of collective reason and logic. Ultimately, it creates room for meaningful differences of opinions, intellectual interactions, and tolerance among people. This value of 'aql joins emotional intelligence and the cognitive function of the human mind. Next value in this chain is to respect the beliefs, faith, and cultures and to recognize and acknowledge the pluralist society. The holy Qurān and the Sunnah of the holy Prophet (PBUH) maintain the freedom in religion and culture of believers as well as non-believers. It is strange in Islamic injunctions as the contemporary advocates of globalization undertake and acclaim the supremacy of a unipolar civilization based on the indigenous practices, customs, and traditions of the European Community or North America. The sixth value is dignity and the protection of the human genealogy, while the seventh value relates to the protection of wealth and property.[22]

Prof Mumtaz Ali states that this agenda of Islamisation of knowledge is general for all mankind and not limited to only Muslims as well as it is not the responsibility or agenda of any specific group but it is the duty of all Muslims. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud says that there is a very serious problem in present-day knowledge as it transforms the young Muslim youth to forget their basic realities of life, a meaningful objective of life, by imposing on them the values and norms of materialistic society through secular knowledge. Therefore, they become confused in their life and become a tragedy for the Muslim ummah. These are not the issues of traditional knowledge in Muslim societies, as that knowledge provides them with a real vision of life and the universe, transforming them into the best version of human beings.[23]

The project, 'Islamisation of Knowledge' places the Muslim problem and crisis of knowledge and education in the domain of the eternal conflict between Islam and Kufr. It identifies the crisis in knowledge and education as the root cause of the comprehensive malaise that has afflicted the Muslim Ummah. The perspective of this perpetual conflict of the Ummah with the forces of Kufr does not try to invoke a specific historical enemy or enemies.

Contribution of Islamisation of Knowledge

The movement for IOK has resulted in the establishment of various think tanks and educational institutions. Foremost among the think tanks is the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) which was established in 1981. The International Institute of Islamic Thought aimed for the intellectual development of Muslim ummah. It has the mission to develop and revive Islamic thought that can effectively deal with contemporary challenges and can contribute to the development of human civilization. It will enable the Muslim ummah to achieve resting on its lost legacy. Another significant contribution is in the form of the International Islamic University, Malaysia (IIUM). The IIUM took education from an

Islamic perspective from its very beginning. One of the mission statements is: "To promote the concept of Islamisation of Human Knowledge in teaching, research, consultancy, dissemination of knowledge and the development of academic excellence in the University". The mission statements of the University are summarized in article 5 of its Constitution as clause (2) of article 5 states that the university shall always reflect the following four core values, that are Integration, Islamisation, Internationalization, and Comprehensive Excellence (IIICE), which are discussed in sections a, b, c and d.[24]

There are other universities that aim at the Islamisation of knowledge. Some of these universities include the Islamic University Chittagong (IUC), Bangladesh, which was established in 1995 with its policy of "continued Islamisation of academic curricula" and to inculcate the Islamic values about the life, nature and the universe; the Asian University of Bangladesh (AUB), established in 1996, which aims to "disseminate knowledge in an ethico-human approach…; and the Riphah International University, Islamabad (RIU), established in 2002, which aims to develop the personality as such that they should be ready for different spheres of life "with concern for the welfare of humanity". As well as, the International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan, established in 1980 and reconstituted in 1985; the Islamic University of Niger, sponsored by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and established in 1986; and the Islamic University in Uganda, conceived at the second summit of OIC in 1974 and inaugurated in 1988. They all aim at Islamizing knowledge at higher education levels and to promote research in various aspects of Islamic education. Equally noticeable is the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), founded in 1987 by IIU Malaysia as an institution for postgraduate teaching and research. Till 2002, the institute was directed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-

Attas who champions "Islamisation of Contemporary Knowledge."

However, despite having some achievements, evidence for the limited success is found in different studies conducted on the Islamisation of Knowledge movement.[25] In the answer to a research question "to what extent has the mission of Islamisation has been actualised at International Islamic University of Malaysia? Abdullah, Hussein and Hisham found that Islamisation of Knowledge at IIUM has limited success due to the lack of Islamised textbooks and well-elaborated theoretical suggestions for teaching and research.[26] Feryad Hussain and Bouzenita state in their study that "it is important to remember that the development of the model for Islamisation by Muslims doesn't make it Islamic, it is only its adherence to the correct Islamic framework that would qualify it as being Islamic."[27] They observe that most of the time we see the opinions on Islam and Fiqhī matters by those people who do not have any qualifications or authority to discuss those matters. So, their opinions are questionable, therefore, in their opinion what is taking place, a big part of that is not accurate and should not be accepted as in the tenets of Islamisation of knowledge.[28]

Therefore, as stated by Prof. Muhammad Mumtaz Ali Muslim intellectuals specifically should realize that they should not get instructions from Western counterparts, and not from Christian schools, as their programs are rooted in their ideologies. The present-day knowledge just teaches individuality to such a level that they forget their responsibilities and have the knowledge of just their rights. It fails to recognize that having a right without a keen sense of duty and responsibility is a denial of the idea of 'right' and 'wrong.' Adaptation guidance from the Western world should be limited to what is beneficial to the Islamic world and should be strictly avoided what is against the

creed of Islam. And gaining pinnacle of development in both worlds-Here and Hereafter should be targeted.[29]

Conclusion

Keen observation of contemporary society highlights the reality and fact that the secular modern Western education system is the core cause of crisis and violence in the modern world. This is highlighted by Western scholars as well. We can review the views of Harry R. Lewis, which he stated in his book "Excellence without Soul".[30] Therefore, to proceed with the project of the Islamisation of Knowledge is not the urgent need of the Muslim ummah alone; rather, the whole of humanity needs it. It can contribute to the blend of contemporary Social Sciences with Revealed knowledge and facts which is the need of today's Communities around the globe.

However, the Islamisation of Knowledge project lacks the proper framework and methodology for Islamising the knowledge. Therefore, the scholars and intellectuals should develop proper frameworks and methodologies for that. In this regard, the paper has discussed certain paradigms to integrate the Islamisation of knowledge into contemporary sciences, as has been suggested by Prof. Muhammad Anees. Islamisation of Human sciences is progressing toward introducing the Islamic perspectives in all disciplines of the modern sciences by developing relationships and connections between the two. Therefore, it is recommended that Muslim Ummah should have one position on the Islamisation of Human sciences and need to unite to promote peace and justice in the world. Specifically, the governments of Muslim countries should take steps to develop strong institutions supported by Islamic scholars and intellectuals who must be devoted to solving the crises of the Ummah. The existing curriculum needs to be revised in the light of Islamisation as well as a need to train teachers and produce new textbooks accordingly.

It is highly recommended with regard to this study that the theme and philosophy of Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK) ought to be a part of all study programs offered by different departments of universities around the Muslim world. It should be applied irrespective of field and major and ought to be taught by individuals who have expertise in this topic and are determined for the revival the education system of the Muslim world as has been suggested by Professor Muhammad Mumtaz Ali.[31] Further, textbooks and educational methodologies of all the universities and higher learning institutions of the Muslim world should be reviewed accordingly and re-evaluated based on the Islamic worldview. They should extract basic ideas from glorious Muslim civilisation which has provided actual foundations of the world's progression and instil in these books.

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