

## A Study of Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's Model of Curriculum Integration

Dr. Syed Zahoor Ahmad Geelani\*

Irfan Bashir Mir\*

### ABSTRACT

*Badiuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) is one of the twentieth century's visionary Muslim thinker and great scholar from Turkey, who developed his ideas on Educational reforms and devised his own method of teaching, combining the religious education with modern scientific education. His views about integration of religious education and modern scientific education are very positive and relevant given the backwardness of Muslims in educational field worldwide. The Madrasah al-Zahra Model given by Said Nursi stands for "integration of knowledge" and has taken full cognizance of the needs of scholars on multidimensional approach viz, religion, science and morality. Nursian model provides an alternative which meets the challenges of modern world and also presses upon the much needed values that education should imbibe to face the new challenges in the wake of westernization of education which leads to cultural and moral onslaught. The Integration of knowledge aims to address the problems of education so as to develop a fruitful and healthy interaction between religious education and modern scientific education. The unique civilizational features of Madrasah al-Zahra model make it a most suitable and culturally viable model for Muslims world all over the globe in particular and the common educant in particular. Therefore, studying this model in depth is highly desirable in the context of the contemporary pedagogical and epistemological issues of integrated Education.*

**Keywords:** *Madrasah al-Zahra model, integrated curriculum, epistemological issues, Pedagogy, Educant.*

### 1. Introduction

Badiuzzaman Said Nursi was a prominent educationist in the twentieth Century Turkey. He was not convinced with the alternatives represented by both the new secularist westernizing visionaries, new mainstream secular intellectuals and the conventionalists who failed to comprehend the idea of the nature of change in all

---

\* Associate Professor, (Teacher Education) School Of Education, C U K, Ganderbal.

\* Research Scholar, School Of Education, Central University of Kashmir, Ganderbal.

its dimensions He built up his ideas on educational reform and created his own technique for educating, combining the religious science with modern science. His views on transforming educational system by his Madrasat-uz-Zehra approach are unique and remarkable. To pronounce that ignorance is the main foe and to believe that this foe can be eliminated only through education Badiuzzaman Said Nursi presented a well-educated model for the community. Human beings are globally experiencing destitution, feeling of inadequacy, sorrow, and numerous different sicknesses. These are often because of others savagery, fear based oppression, degenerate educating, financial and political dangers just as ecological debacles. This phenomenon becomes more critical and complicated with accelerated scientific achievements, innovative headways and technological advancements. Therefore, numerous Muslim contemporary researchers have strived to determine some conceivable answers as enduring answers for every different sort of human issues. Accordingly, the most prominent Muslim scholar of the time, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877-1960) had spearheaded and engendered and propagated his original views and positive actions based on revelation and faith as feasible answers for the improvement of mankind. In this context, the current study examines Said Nursi's educational thoughts regarding the concept of integrated curriculum based on his proposed educational model that is *Madrasah al- Zahra* in order to so as to infer some possible answers as a reasonable answer for the flourishing and all-round improvement of mankind. Therefore, the elucidation of Said Nursi's life and his *Risale-i Nur* theoretically and practically would be significant.

## **2. Badiuzzaman Said Nursi: A Biographic Sketch**

Popular as Bediuzzaman, Wonder of the Age, Said Nursi was born on 1876 in a village called Nurs, in the city of Bitlis situated in eastern Anatolia. However, there is a difference regarding his date of birth as some of the biographers have referenced his date of birth as 1873 and 1878. The title Bediüzzaman was conferred upon to him by Molla Fatah Allah of Siirt for his outstanding ability and the speed with which he mastered different sciences. He was called Nursi in relation to his birth place-Nurs. His father's name was Mirza and mother's Nure. He was extraordinarily intelligent with unusual memory and enormous ability toward learning.

## **3. Educational Issues of Muslim World**

Bediuzzaman felt that existing Educational framework was not addressing the need of the society, it was rather promoting gap between two sections of the society,

intelligentsia of religious sciences and that of modern sciences. Not even that, but two streams had mistaken assumptions about every others. In the recent past, the world has witnessed gigantic advancement and improvement in the field of science. So many factors like technological advancements, new inventions and discoveries, enhancement of health and hygiene, globalization, and others govern the current trend. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi expressed that the current period—dominated by the scientific developments—demands to weld religious knowledge and the one based on experiments—scientific knowledge—together. Therefore Said Nursi was not satisfied with the system of Education prevalent at that time in Turkey. Education was mostly given through dual institutions; *mekteb's* and *medrasa's*. The system offered by the former was western oriented, with a focus on positivist approach to sciences, whereas the latter institution a classical Islamic education. During this time there was no system of Education in the country offering both scientific and religious training. *Mekatib* and *medaris* as the places of popular education at that time appeared to convey pride in their different curricula, each being critical of the other. Nursi was profoundly troubled with these issues. He often communicated his dissatisfaction towards traditional religious scholars whose discussion could not provide solutions to the serious issues of the time. Nursi was convinced that religion did not consist exclusively of faith matters but due to its comprehensiveness, it is also connected with world of science including sociology, politics and economics. (Markham and Pirim, 2011, p. 10)

To comprehend the understanding of religion knowledge of all these subjects are also necessary. And yet he gave religion a place of supremacy over a wide range of sciences. He contended that “*Islam is the master and guide of the sciences, and the chief and father of all true knowledge*” (Nursi, Muhakemat,p.8). He argued that if the students are taught in this method, those in the secular schools will be saved from being without religion, while those in the religious schools will be saved from b extremism. A fine combination of scientific and religious sciences as envisaged by Nursi can be seen from the conclusion he drawn: ‘*The Religious sciences are the light of the conscience and the modern sciences i.e. sciences of civilization are the light of the reason; the truth becomes manifest through the combination of the two. The student's endeavour will take flight on these two wings. When they are separated it gives rise to bigotry in the one, and wiles and skepticism in the other.*’ (Nursi, Munazarat, 2007, p. 508). Marazi (2015) Nursi observed that majority of prophets emerging in Asia whereas majority of philosophers coming from the West. This became a sign of Divine Pre-determination that Asia has religion and spirit to develop humanity. For him, philosophy and wisdom should supplement

this religion and spirit and do not replace them. Said Nursi holds that “the conscience is illuminated by the religious sciences, and the mind is illuminated by the physical sciences and wisdom occurs through the combination of these two.” Before him, religious education is the ‘light of conscience’ and modern education the ‘light of mind,’ and when both are consolidated together the ‘truth’ is revealed and if alienated then the former gives rise to ‘skepticism’ and the later to ‘fanaticism’. Nursi had confined that the Muslims becoming progressive when applying Islam and becoming backwardness if they slackened off. He asserted that the Western civilization has absence of righteousness and guidance but mere lust and passion, hostility and subjugation that has been infiltrated by revolutionary societies and crushed the supremacy of Asian civilization temporarily. Therefore, there is a need for change after the completion of Islam and a space for reformation in all aspects of life including legislation and education. Therefore, Nursi called for educational change in order to address the human error and ultimately, to gain real happiness.

#### **4. Curriculum Integration as an Educational Solution**

In the times of Said Nursi, a good number of Muslim erudite people stood for the integration process of religious and modern sciences “in such a way that reveals insight not only about the relevance to the present situation, but also in a way that defines universal principles.” Among them, the prominent one was Muhammad Abduh, who believed that “Science was a way of life rooted in freedom and progress; in its pure form, science, when properly married to religion, brings society to fulfilment.” According to Said Nursi, students of the modern education system should be trained in religious subjects, and comparatively, products of the religious schools should be well equipped with the modern trend of the world, so that the two sections of the society could have enough chances to comprehend both the sciences using their aptitudes. The fundamental purpose of his initiative was to produce a sincere and committed Muslim citizen so as to dispose the crisis of the Muslim intelligentsia and to develop science and technology in the Muslim world (Ahmad, 2014). His views that religious subjects should be taught in the secular schools (maktabs) and the positive science in the religious schools (madrasa’s) so that the structure of secular education are salvaged from sceptical conduct and the religious schools from bigotry, are very progressive. Moreover, his views about reconciliation of science and theology with education are very futuristic and rewarding given the pathetic situations of Muslims in educational field worldwide. Education based on faith was the central point of Nursi’s educational philosophy. Nursian concern with knowledge based on belief in God is very much worthy of

consideration. He believed that the conscience is illuminated by the religious sciences and the mind is illuminated by the science of civilization and wisdom occurs from the combination of these two. Nursi says, “The light of conscience is religious sciences (ulum-u- diniya). The light of mind is civilized sciences (funun-u-medeniya). Reconciliation of both manifests the truth. The student’s skills develop further with these two sciences (ulum-u-diniya and funun-u-medenyne) but when they are separated superstition from the former and corruption and skepticism from the latter is born”. The educational model given by Said Nursi was very exceptionally comprehensive and progressive and caters needs both of religion, science and morality and thus makes a consequently makes an amicable mix or a harmonious blend of all the three in a holistic manner. Nursian model of education utperforms all the Educational models, presented and practiced by his contemporaries in South Asia, where both the objectives of empowerment through education and integration of religion with science and technology can comfortably be realized practically and in a convincing balance.

Nursi is of the conviction that knowledge, education and faith form the prime elements for renewal of civilization whose integration provides the platform for development and perfection. This linking of *ilm* (Knowledge) and *iman* (faith) form the core of Nursian model of Educational system. These terms *ilm* and *iman* although had been examined by scholars individually but their deep-seated interlink between them had rarely been explored. In this regard Nursian concept of Education based on belief in God and Education produced from belief in God is very much worthy of consideration (Ahmad 2014). Said Nursi believed that the Education system of the society should be the integration of knowledge and faith. As indicated by him, it is essential that faith and knowledge complement each other. For, if any one of these two factors of education, i.e. knowledge and faith, lose then that education system or concept cannot make any difference or progress (The Letters, 1997, pp. 265). Will Grant in his masterpiece *Pleasures of Philosophy* is in complete accord with Said Nursi’s views on Education. He observes, “*Education that is entirely scientific and materialistic can produce nothing but tools and modern machines. It alienates man from beauty and estranges him from wisdom*”(Grant,Will , 1953, pp. 168-169). Muhammad (2014) views that Nursi’s idea regarding the integration of religious and scientific knowledge will give an insight into modern knowledge and understanding value of education along with need and necessity of ethical education so as to rebuilding the carcass of learning on reasonable line. This is what Nursi had attempted to convey in his artful culmination *Risale-i-Nur*. Marazi (2014) claims that, Nursi had earlier started

promoting the integration of knowledge, as a positive action to restore Islamic civilization. Nursi criticized existing institutions and mentalities and endeavoured to provide an option and authentically Islamic and modern approach to meet the current challenges. Further, he analyzes that, as an answer to the cultural divide within and outside the Ottoman Empire and Westernization, which is considered to bring more to Muslim world. Nursi offered the integration of Islam as “**umbrella of a common faith**” to all Muslims into the advantage of Western technology and knowledge. Ali (2014) also mentions that Nursi had developed his own ideas on educational reform and method of teaching, integrating the religious and modern sciences. Nursi viewed that modern science and logic were the way of the future; hence he advocated that the religious sciences should be taught in secular schools meanwhile the modern sciences ought to be introduced in religious schools.

#### **5. Integration of Religion and Modern Sciences: Said Nursi’s Madrasah al-Zahra Model**

Said Nursi showed a total disappointment toward the division of education system between maktab and madrasah in the country. Maktab system dealt with the modern sciences and the madrasah with the religious sciences. His showing of discontent represents in some way or the other that the union and inseparability of religious and modern science is in the current times an compulsory demonstration. It is this principle that should form a basic starting point in terms of education policy. Nursi observed that the West eradicated its backwardness by improving the standard of science and learning, therefore in an endeavour to weld and reform the two apparently clashing systems religion and modern education, he dreamt of establishing a university in eastern Anatolia with the name of Madrasah al-Zahra and determined the nuts and bolts of this university including its aim, organization, syllabus, nature, and funding. Marazi (2015) posits that this model stands for ‘integration of knowledge’ that cheers religious subjects to be taught in the secular schools (maktabs) and the positive sciences in the religious school (madrasahs). This is to make the students of modern secular sciences being safeguarded from sceptical conduct, meanwhile religious sciences students will be equipped with technological advancement and become more progressive.

He further observes that Nursi’s thoughts regarding the integration of science and technology with education are extremely creative and meaningful in the educational dilemma for Muslims all over the globe. Initiating a dialogue between science and religion, Nursi attempted to develop a philosophical understanding of nature, as he uncovered that the religious philosophy shared if not absolutely but

to a great extent, the same domain as the natural sciences. He does not consider science as something that is alien or something that is beyond the domain of religion. According to him, “. . . man has been awakened and aroused by modern sciences in particular; he has understood the true nature of humanity.” It implies that Said Nursi tried to manifest that all the knowledge is religious, irrespective of the source.

#### 6. Nursi's Views About Curriculum And Methodology

The main purpose of ‘Madrasah al Zehra’ was the reconciliation of religious sciences and secular knowledge. Nursi states it clearly, “The people of (medrasah) religious schools accuse the people of modern schools of weakness of belief due to their outward appearance. The people of modern schools regard the people of religious schools as deficient and uninformed because they do not know about the new branches of science. The differences in the views and methods disrupted the Islamic ethics and prevented people from contemporary civilization. The only solution to this is to teach religious sciences properly in modern schools, to teach new branches of exact sciences instead of ancient Greek philosophy, which is unnecessary now, in religious schools and to have very able scholars in dervish lodges. For him the fundamental reason for learning of science is to comprehend the Quran and demonstrate its truths. Understanding the Quran should be the fundamental point and purpose of learning science and object of life. Bediuzzaman often stresses the need for students to specialize in one subject, for which they have an aptitude and inclination, and in addition only study subjects which complement it. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that specialization in particular subject represented a radical break with conventional techniques.

Nursi introduced new methodology of teachings: the lesson given to students should not contain academic words only and be made more fascinating; it should be given in a language they understand and through simple sentences and concrete examples. It is the responsibility of the teacher to stimulate interest and enthusiasm of the students in the subject. Nursi believed that *madrasahs* should forsake the old style of studying and start a new method and content. The students should be intently checked, closely monitored and properly guided based on their performance. It is important to educate through discussing with the students so that they will develop constructive, synthesizing and discovering intelligence. With this view, Nursi implies teaching in the form of question and answer. Badiuzzaman criticizes scholars who live among the pages of the books and do not proceed beyond theory; he wants scholars to give importance to application and

experiments in education. He therefore rejects the education approach based on memorization and wants to introduce an education approach that gives importance to pragmatic considerations and development of curious reasoning in the minds of the students. Moreover the teacher should adapt the topic he instructs into life, should make the lesson exuberant through alluring precedents and attractive examples and should convince the students that the knowledge he gives will be needed in life. In order to obtain positive results from students it is necessary to make them have a feeling of responsibility and conviction that education is necessary. It is also necessary to have ethical values for a successful education career. The education and control of a child whose spiritual aspect is neglected becomes impossible in all aspects.

### **7. Integrated Curriculum: A way forward**

According to Ali (2011), in empowering integrated education, Nursi has distinguished several guidelines as reference for Muslims as follows:

- a) Conducting an exhaustive review of the whole current systems of education so as to resuscitate a sustainable civilization.
- b) Reviewing basically conventional religious system of education and restructuring entirely its curriculum.
- c) Unifying the three different systems of education which are traditional religious, modern secular and Islamic mysticism (Sufism) into an efficient and comprehensive system of education.
- d) Harmonizing the three principle components of material, spiritual and moral which are necessary in the curriculum of education.
- e) Practicing three languages or called as “tri-lingual” to be medium of teaching and learning with mandatory for Arabic and more emphasis on native language.
- f) Assessing Islam to be a source of reference to wide range of knowledge, including modern science.
- g) Promoting the establishment of an Islamic integrated university that implement the real integration of religious and modern sciences.

### **8. Conclusion**

The educational model given by Said Nursi is very extensive, comprehensive, dynamic and progressive and I feel it can cater needs, both of scientific education and morality and thus makes a harmonious blend of both in a holistic manner. Nursian model of education has an edge over all the Educational models, presented and practiced by his contemporaries in South Asia, where both the objectives of

empowerment through education and integration of religion with science and technology can comfortably be realized practically and in a convincing balance. The unique civilization features of **Madrasah-al-Zehra model** make it a suitable, reasonable and culturally suitable model for Muslims in its global perspective as well. Therefore studying this model in depth is highly desirable in the context of the consumerist tendencies emerging in the spheres of education and technology by consigning spiritual and moral values to margins. Nursian model provides an alternative which meets the demand of modern times but does not neglect the much needed values the education should imbibe to face the civilization challenges in the wake of the invasion of atheism and materialism in name of development, modernization and progress.

**Bibliography**

Ahmed, A. (2014). Said Nursi's Concepts of Education and Revitalization of Muslim Culture and Civilization with Special Reference to Southeast Asia, proceeding of International Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and Risale-i Nur Symposium on Civilization, Jakarta, Indonesia.

Ali, S.J. (2014). "Badiuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to Modern Education.", paper presented at Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and his Risale-i-Nur "Role and Place of Said Nursi's Thought in 21st Century", *Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science & Technology, Awantipora, J&K in collaboration with The Istanbul Foundation for Science & Culture, Turkey, 21-22 August.*

Çoruh, H. (2015). Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and his understanding of exegesis in his Risale-i-Nur (*Doctoral thesis, Australian Catholic University*). Retrieved from <http://researchbank.acu.edu.au/theses/516>

Marazi, H. (2015). "Empowering Education With Values And Integration Of Religion And Science: Madrasah Al-Zahra Model", *Proceedings of International Conference on Empowering Islamic Civilization in the 21st Century, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin Malaysia.*

Marazi, H. (2014). "Relevance of Said Nursi to Modern World", paper presented at Badiuzzamaan Said Nursi and his Risale-i Nur "Role and Place of Said Nursi's Thought in 21st Century", *Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science & Technology, Awantipora, J&K in collaboration with The Istanbul Foundation for Science & Culture, Turkey 21-22 August.*

Markham, S, Ian and Pirim, Suendam (2011). An Introduction to Said Nursi, Life, Thought and writings. *Nursi, Muhakemat, Istanbul: Soz Press.* Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

Muhammad, A. (2014) "Towards an Integration of Knowledge in Said Nursi's Thought", paper presented at Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and his Risale-i Nur "Role and Place of Said Nursi's Thought in 21st Century", *Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science & Technology, Awantipora, J&K in collaboration with The Istanbul Foundation for Science & Culture, Turkey 21-22 August.*

Nursi, S.B. (1997). *Muhakemat*. Istanbul: Sozler Yayinevi. (Original work published 1956).

Nursi, S.B. (2004). *Munazarat*. (S. Vahide, Trans). Istanbul: Sozler Nesriyat San. (Original work published 1956).

Nursi, S.B. (2007). *The Risale-i nur collection: Al-mathnawi al-nuri (Seedbed of the light)*. (H. Akarsu, Trans.). USA, New Jersey: The Light, Inc. (Original work published 1956).

