

## Islamic Education and Educational Development: Challenges and Prospects

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### ABSTRACT

The paper attempts at deciphering the purpose and role of education in Islamic world-view. Relating the developments in the field to the modern times has thrown up serious challenges to the survival and development of its brilliant legacy. Modernism developed in the course of post-Renaissance philosophy led the whole civilizational development of man on the basis of positivist philosophy. Development of science and technology, though inherited by the West from the Islamic world, took a different turn and created the so-called scientific temper and man's insistence on knowing the Truth from the empirical method only. His senses, ratio and reason are sufficient to guide him, not only know the reality but to manage himself and the world to the development of the best after best. Materialism, capitalism, communism, socialism, hedonism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, globalization are some of the fruits of this thinking. Ecological Crisis, Economic Recession, Big gaps between rich and poor, continued existence of conflict spots, wars, terrorism, disinformation campaigns, too should be owned up by the upholders of this civilization. Energy crisis, pollution, loss of meaning, Postmodernism has only added to the frustrations of the modern man. That crisis is overwhelming and no solutions are in sight for the modern man has put up serious challenge and opportunity for the Ummah of Islam to delve deep into their ethos and come up with authentic and moderate solutions to the crisis. The paper shall elaborate some critical measures, which can help the modern man overcome the crisis and lead a life which is fulfilling not only in this world but brings God's grace, hence salvation in the hereafter. Islamic education shall marshal the spiritual domain of one's personality to dominate his bestial self with full utilization of his sensory, rational and experiential capabilities. Same has to be the treatment to the society and the humanity in general. Muslim communities have to develop necessary intellectual capabilities to convince the modern man to moderate his worldview. By developing a transcendental world-

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view, Muslims can build up bridges across authentic traditions for developing a universal model of balanced education where man's self, society, state and globe is relooked from the divine perspectives, a legacy of religions, last of all authentically nurtured and continued by the Islamic Ummah.

**Key words:** Transcendental world-view, Spiritual domain, Islamic education, Global crisis.

### 1. Introduction

Islamic education is integrally linked to its world-view. *Tauheed* (Monotheism) is the bedrock of Islamic civilization. Knowledge of One True God leads one to believing in Him and striving in His path to actualize the belief. Purpose of life, Purpose of the creation, relationship of man to God, to His creation and the end result of true belief, right thoughts and right actions are some dimensions of Islamic world-view. There are a set of answers for these questions which are derived from *Tauheed* and there are many other possible answers to these questions which are not entertainable by the *Tauheedic* world-view. One True God is the source of all, besides God, everything else is creation. The universe or the universes, man, angels, jinn are all created by Him only. Man and Jinn have been created for His worship only. Islamic education is to actualize the inherent tendencies of man to accept and actualize his real status i.e., being a servant (*'Abd*) of God only. Islamic legacy of learning has made man positively inclined to know his Creator and Sustainer, develop attitude and behavioral patterns which suit his true status. It introduces to man a set of achievable targets in his personal, family and social life. It guides him with the moral, spiritual and legal frameworks in all spheres of his life, worship, economic intellectual and political domains. While Islam's legacy is securely based on divine scripture and the blessed role model of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), it allows the profound scholars to seek the authentic guidance and solutions to the temperament and needs of man in the dynamics of time and place. Islamic scholarship has successfully been at the vanguard of exerting their best efforts towards this goal (*Ijtihād*). Islam terms the Muslim community (*Ummah*) as the median *Ummah*, which treads the middle path. Historically speaking Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is a link between the antiquity and the Modern world. While

antiquity possessed and was dominated by the divine legacies and innumerable prophets and messengers of God, the modern man seems to be too obsessed with his mundane and material concerns only. Hence Islam is a link between spirituality and material concerns of man. A happy blend of the spirit and matter. The modern man can be rescued by Islamic education not only by moderating this materially obsessed life but offering salvation to him by connecting him to God as higher ethical values.

## 2. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and Islamic Educational Legacy

Holy Quran is the word of God, sent by God through archangel Gabriel to Muhammad (ﷺ) for transmission and guidance of mankind across regions till doomsday. The Prophet (ﷺ) exemplified the commands and objectives of God in time-space framework and demonstrated how humans, on individual, family and social level can harness the noble qualities and noble goals and eschew the wicked tendencies within and without. Knowledge, learning, teaching, inculcating practices in accordance with knowledge, acquired not only deeper meanings but sanctity as well. Spiritual and high ethical considerations overwhelmed even the tasks which seem to be otherwise mundane. Here, divine knowledge as obtained through the divine scripture, Al-Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah (utterances and practices of the blessed Prophet which are the second most important sources of authentic knowledge and practice), guides man's thoughts and experiences as obtained through his sensory, rational and intellectual faculties. Here, transcendental truths accommodate the terrestrial truth and the man secured on the slippery planet of phenomenon. Godliness permeates human thought and action. The Prophet declares that he has been sent as a teacher (par excellence).

It is not surprising that the blessed Prophet led the educational movement of mankind, with widespread and profound individual and societal implications. Literacy, learning, teaching, reforming, moralizing, spending on weak and orphan, earning through rightful means only, living dignified life of piety, purity, worship, grace, courage, truthfulness, virtue, patience became all integrated into the teaching-learning milieu of the community.

'Scholar's ink is holier than the martyr's blood', thus spoke the Prophet and nurtured a responsible legacy of learning and teaching, sanctified, objectives, motivations and processes involved so much as the fruits of knowledge and learning didn't confine to any class, society, region, ethnicity and country of the world, but became a universal phenomenon a privilege accessible and achievable for all for ennobling one self. Spread of Islam across Arabia, beyond Arabia into Iran, Iraq and Syria, then Egypt and whole of North Africa, across Gibraltar into Spain, South Asia, Central Asia, South East Asia, carried with it the noblest culture of transmission of knowledge and Teaching-learning legacy. This legacy led to the development of oral traditions, transfer of oral transmission to writing ones, checking, rechecking the written forms, investigating the chain of transmitters, their beliefs, memory, honesty, dealings etc. to ascertain their reliability. Emergence of multiple Islamic '*ulūm* (sciences) around Quran and Sunnah like *Ilm al-Qirat* and *Ilm al-Tajweed* (Recitation), *Ilm Asma al-Rijal* (sciences related to investigation of persons transmitting *Hadith* literature) have generated unprecedented systems of knowledge acquisition and transmission. Despite wide differences among the people in diverse regions, Islamic sciences have succeeded in overcoming the hazards of time and secured the authenticity of not only Quran and Sunnah but even the '*ulūm* (sciences) related to them, so much so that a living Islamic tradition thrived across the globe testifying to the superior system of preservation of sacred knowledge.

Islamic world-view generated a quest for knowledge and within short span of time splendid knowledge hubs were established; *Bait al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom) established by the Abbasids in 9<sup>th</sup> century attracted scholars from the most civilized nations of the world across regional, religious and cultural divides. Philosophy, Astronomy, Mathematics, Optics, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, Medicine and other branches of sciences got a boost. Human contributions in Greece, China, India, Iran, Syria, Iraq and other places were synthesized and developed by the veterans over the centuries across the Islamic world from Spain to China. Centers of Excellences in the Islamic world continued to develop for centuries and prove a beacon for the world. Free exchange of ideas, skills and techniques was the order of

the day. No part of the then world was left unaffected by the knowledge and civilizational march of Islam. Even the Tatar invasion and destruction of the most important parts of the most civilized world from Central Asia to West Asia in 13<sup>th</sup> century could not extinguish the torch of enlightenment of Islam. Even political and economic upheavals in the heartland of Islam could not prevent the emergence and development of Islamic learning in the periphery – Ottomans and South East Asia testify the veracity of Islam's inner strength to touch the inner most chords of man and affecting it positively in the absence of a political and military superiority of the upholders of faith.

### 3. Modernism and Educational Crisis

Emergence of positivist philosophies in the West and Western man; rebellious attitude to religion snapped a living link of man with God. Man's world view changed. His self identity and his purpose of life, his relationship with others was informed not of religious data but of his animalistic speculations, wants, wishes and fantasies. Most of his presumptions were speculative, his senses and rationality were employed to his assertion that he is self-sufficient and does not need any superior sources for his guidance. He is the be all and end all of life. He is rebellious of God. He ignores rather rejects divine guidance. He does not accept the life after death and that this life is only a testing place. West's anti-religious attitude led to the development of a science which is not a sign of God's grace and power as was the case during medieval period. While the West benefitted profusely from the development made by the Muslims during their heydays spanning many centuries in all the fields of science, it, however, mischievously ignored the spiritual and ethical underpinnings of that legacy. Now the purpose, motivation for acquisition of knowledge was changed. Man assumed the position of God and this worldly life for creating a utopian paradise. Development of materialism, capitalism, industrialization leads to colonialism, neo-colonialism wars, Nuclearization, militarization and big gaps between rich and poor. Discriminations, commercialization of knowledge, consumerism are some of the offshoots of modernism. Knowledge for power, more knowledge for more power, power for more power became the mantra of modern man living across the globe. East and West are reverberating with the same mantra as globalization has seriously

influenced all the cultures of the world. Post modernism is simply an admission of the falsity of modernistic presumption without any clue for solutions. Global Crisis spanning all the spheres of human thought and action is no more an intellectual problem. It is an existential one. Human race is on the brink of extinction, mostly outcome of its thought and action.

Like other cultures, Islamic culture too has not been spared of the influence of the modernistic ideas. Hence, the question of self-introspection is called for. If the doctors get infected, they need to take care of themselves, then only they can treat the patients. Modernism has evoked varied types of response from different individuals and groups in the recent centuries. However, well intentioned they have been, they seem to be now inadequate for the enormity and complexity of the crises faced by the humanity. Highly specialized institutions of learning have been almost made exclusive to those who possess enormous material resources. Globalization and commercialization of education has only reinforced the supremacy of white man and increasing of gulf between have's and have not's. Consumerism has made the overwhelming majority of the population just as the consumerists for the benefit of the few. General humanity, weak, wronged and those falsely hoping to catch up with the West need to relook if they are chasing a mirage; how their concept of education and their educational institutions help them prose men of correct vision, character and determination to seek solutions to their problems. Following blindly the west, is only to repeat the blunders committed by them and land at the brink of cultural suicide and intellectual bankruptcy. Out of box solutions are often talked about, less thought about. The west's insistence and forcible imposition of its vision and interests on the globe has resulted in accentuating the crisis.

#### **4. Development of Islamic Education: A Panacea for the World**

The world of Islam needs educational leaders and institutions that value the highly balanced and moderate civilization the most, produced by its divinely inspired legacy, which spiritual and ethical framework overwhelms man's physical, material and mundane interests. Man's position on earth is to be reiterated as vicegerent of One True God, who develops a paradigm for thought and action, where due concern is taken for varied human needs and wishes as per divine scheme. Man's spiritual

dimension is more important than the physical one. Hence, educational philosophy of a God-centric man strikes the median path with everything. Human soul, spirit and material self is harmonized, the peace returns to man. This harmony is sought in family and state by subordinating the bestial tendencies of individual, society and the state to the spiritual and ethical imperatives. Safety and security of traditional knowledge and its institutions become more important because authentic divine knowledge with all piety and purity attached to it can be called upon to help build up an intellectual and cultural landscape where humanity can seek the redressal of their problems. Further, Muslim intellectuals and institutions need to shun the Oriental frameworks which have kept them captives for long to go beyond it and to seek the foundational principles of building a truer and purer intellectual ethos for appropriating Islamic civilizational goals in the contemporary period. They need to understand and realize that their problem is not lagging behind the West in material possession but making enough efforts to develop intellectual tools to connect to the modern mind and soul for making him realize the criticality of divine message for the mankind. A lot of intellectuals in the most industrially advanced countries have been expressing their anguish over the state of affairs and declaring the inadequacy of their methods and tools for redressing the crisis, but Muslim intellectuals are probably not well updated about this aspect. High intellectual caliber with commitment, a noble soul with pious intentions, groomed in the profound legacy of Islamic culture could help formulate the narrative which has a universal appeal, and addresses the connection between current global crises and the deficiencies of the contemporary educational system. That way it is not a Muslim problem but a global human problem. Islam enjoins its followers to guide the humanity to the truth. Intellectual field is the one which deserves the best of input. Necessarily, a global human narrative has a global human appeal. It can have its regional and local derivatives which could address regional and local issues in the light of the global narrative. Hence, educational development in the Islamic perspective would mean primarily developing a correct perspective on education in tune with the purpose of man on earth on the basis of divine commands. Secondly, it would mean fulfilling the basic needs of the common people without institutionalizing discrimination and exploitation of the common people,

development of appropriate institution and strategies for the correction and replacement of the existing structures and institutions to ensure equality and justice among the people. Enjoining good and forbidding evil is the duty of this *Ummah* hence identification of good objectives and policies is imperative and making them as propelling forces of society is called for. Similarly, identifying the negative targets, convincing humans of destructiveness of such thoughts, institutions and practices is a challenging task but worth pursuing.

### 5. Conclusion

A reappraisal of Islamic world view shall re-enforce the faith of the *Ummah* to rejuvenate their intellectual commitments to the *Tauheedic* (Monotheistic) paradigms. Treating all mankind as his family and developing appropriate intellectual tools to develop a universal human narrative is the duty of the faithful community, *Ummah*. Post Renaissance man has developed positivist philosophy that led man's neglect and rebellion to God. Hence, capitalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism have damaged mankind enormously. Modernism and post modernism has only demonstrated the inadequacies of human thought in the absence of divine guidance, which the positivist man debunked, led to the debasement of human, who forgot his true own self (spirit) and became just another animal – to pursue only animalistic aspirations. Enormous global crises from environment to man's individual life are permeated by this ethos of forgetfulness (forgetting his origin, purpose and end). Educational systems of the western /materialistic world views have failed to restrain the fall of the modern man which has pushed the civilization to the brink of animalization. Islamic education and its development in the contemporary scene demands an appraisal of the current global crisis, its dimensions and complexities involved. Certainly, its educational institutions follow only the world view it approves, thus producing those who are not part of solution but of problem. Appropriate intellectual apparatus need to be devised and developed to address the global human crises in Islamic perspective and development of appropriable solution sought. This is possible provided well meaning intellectuals, well versed and the rich legacy of Islam do the needful. New



and bright future for Islamic education awaits those who have vision and courage to take up the cudgels.

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