

Towards Understanding Islamic Paradigm of Education

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Abstract

Islam represents a comprehensive code of civilization encompassing all the dimensions of human thought and life. A civilization experiences both rise and fall. It rises and enjoys continuous growth as long as it manages to lead its members to grow intellectually and morally. It falls when intellectual as well as moral growth of man reach the point of stagnation. Both growth and stagnation are indicative of the education system adopted by society. Similarly, Islam considers education a very essential tool to mould human thought and life. Its educational system, as the history stands witness, has the potential to lead civilization to the pinnacle. Islamic system of education is composed of a clear objective of human recognition of God the ultimate reality and development of man at both intellectual and moral level. Fundamental principles of this system are: 1) unification of so called secular and religious curricula, 2) rational and critical approach in teaching and learning, 3) continuous process of research and development based on three point formula – acquisition of available knowledge, application of observation and in-depth enquiry into the validity of the ideas incorporated in the existing knowledge and development of new form and substance of knowledge, 4) refurbishing and reorientation of disciplines of study, and 5) teacher-student close relationship governed by love, respect and other basic human values.

Introduction

That educational system represents ambitions of a people and determines the direction of a society may hardly be contested. Islam seeks to

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set up its own civilization on the earth.¹ For that matter the *Qur'ān* serves as its comprehensive constitution,² which is based on knowledge ('ilm).³ It does not allow man to act without knowledge.⁴ There is no room in its philosophy for illiteracy, which it views as the source of all kinds of fallacies, superstitions and irrational approaches in day-to-day life and activities.⁵ Its objective of education and principles of teaching and learning may be found essentially different from other cultural entities' objective and principles of education including secular ones. A humble attempt has been made in this paper to outline objectives as well as basic principles of Islamic system of education in the light of the *Qur'ān* and life-example of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS.).

An Overview of Educational System in the Muslim World

Educational system prevailing in the Muslim world today is not a secret. It is as clear as anything in the daylight. Whether the Muslim minorities in non-Muslim majority countries such as India, China, Thailand, South Africa, U.S.A. etc. or the Muslim nations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt etc., their system of education is almost uniform, variations being very minor hence negligible. All the Muslim institutions in the contemporary world may be divided into three major categories: religious, secular and religious cum secular.

Religious Educational Institutions

Muslim educational institutions offering only religious studies are in great number. Their common features may be summarized as follows:

Objectives

Most of the religious educational institutions in the Muslim world have been established with the sole purpose of serving and promoting one or another juridical school of thought. Preference of certain works as text books for various disciplines of studies, application of certain particular methods of teaching and learning, selection of teachers, and admission of students on the basis of certain chosen backgrounds in these institutions, all these explicitly refer to the fact that the very objective of these centers of learning is to strengthen the cause of a certain particular school of *fiqh*. Dār al-'Ulūm,

Deoband, a well known religious institution of learning in India, for instance, was founded with the sole purpose of serving the *Hanafite* school of jurisprudence and it is still carrying out the same mission.⁶ Islamic University, Madīnah, Saudi Arabia, which was established only few decades ago, serves as a center of studies in Islamic theology.⁷ Deep study of its form and product will show that it is a university to promote traditional approach to learn Islam, thus siding with *ahl al-ḥadīth* who seek to demolish the very edifice of *fiqhī* schools.⁸ Indo-Pak sub-continent constitutes the largest nations in terms of Muslim population, accounting for almost 50% of the total Muslim population in the world. This part of the Muslim world has adopted either *fiqhī* approach in its educational system or the philosophy of *ahl al-ḥadīth*. The rest of the Muslim world follows almost the same pattern in their religious schools and universities.

Curricula

Major disciplines of studies in these institutions are related to *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, logic, 'aqā'id, 'ilm al-kalām, *taṣawwuf*, Islamic history and 'Arabic language. As it appears, logic, 'aqā'id, 'ilm al-kalām and *taṣawwuf* are out-dated and irrelevant to the present needs. The methodology applied and issues discussed in these areas of knowledge are no longer significant in the modern world. The books selected for *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* are old and classical representing an environment unavailable today. New works may be found included in the list of textbooks, but these are to a great extent duplication of the old ones. The same is true about Islamic history. As for the 'Arabic language, a number of new text-books have been developed for its teaching and learning, apart from some old texts; but neither the old texts nor the new ones are helpful for the students to bring them close to the *Qur'ānic* language. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī's remark speaks volumes of the situation of Arabic language curricula prescribed in Muslim religious schools: "Arabic language being taught in our religious schools and universities represents the Arabic of Qalyūbī, Naḥḥat al-yemen, or that of Ḥarīrī and Mutanabbī. The nature of Arabic language could easily be perceived by reading the newspapers and magazines in Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt. It is undoubtedly Arabic language, but it is so different from the *Qur'ānic*

language that it does not bring one close to the *Qur'ān* but rather it takes one away from the *Qur'ān*. The language in which the *Qur'ān* was revealed is neither the language of Ḥarīrī and Mutanabbī nor that of newspapers and magazines of Egypt and Syria, but it is in that classical language which was used by poets like Imr'ū al-Qais, 'Amr ibn Kulthūm, Zuhair and Labīd as well as great orators such as Quss ibn Sā'idah".⁹

Method of Teaching and Learning

The method of teaching and learning in religious educational institutions is information-intensive. It helps the students gather a large amount of information on a subject but it does not enable them to properly use this information. Critical, rational and analytical approaches are almost missing in the classroom. The prescribed text of a subject is read either by the teacher or by students in the classes and further elaborated by the teacher. The text and its elaboration by the teacher are both memorized by the students with utmost preciseness. For example, for *tafsīr* course on particular *tafsīr* work is prescribed, the teacher elaborates the statements or views of the *mufasssīr* further, linguistically and ideologically heeding very little the very statement of the *Qur'ān*. The teacher seldom tries to interpret the *Qur'ānic āyāt* on his own with the help of desirably necessary tools of *tafsīr*; he fully depends on the opinions of old and classical *mufasssīrūn*. The main task of the teacher in the class is to elaborate the statements of the *mufasssīr* and not those of the *Qur'ān*, yet he feels that he is teaching *Qur'ān* and the students believe that they are learning the Book of Allah. In this environment of learning students stand discouraged to use their reason; they are required to cram their power of memory with the information supplied by the teacher so as to be able to reproduce the same in the examinations. Questions and comments from students are unwelcome. A student feeling free to express his doubt on the views of the teacher or those of the respected Islamic scholars is considered very daring and anomalous. The nature of relationship between the teacher and the taught is almost the same as between the mystical guide (*murshid*) and the disciple (*murīd*), where the latter accepts blindly and wholeheartedly the lessons given by the former. The students with strong memory in religious schools have better chances to

achieve excellent grades in examinations. It is this very reason that the students in these institutions memorize not only the *Qur'Ēn* but also other works in different fields of learning no matter whether they comprehend the memorized information fully or not. Examination question papers are of merely descriptive nature; critical and rational questions are rare.

End Products

Graduates of these institutions are generally absorbed by mainly three service sectors: mosque-related services, Islamic mission (*da'wah*) and teaching in religious schools and universities. They are not considered capable of joining other areas of services. They hardly play any significant role in building the Muslim society. Rather, they bring about negative changes in the society. A graduate of a particular institution representing a particular school of *fiqh* always represent his own brand of Islam. The predominant objective of his life is to prove the validity of his approach and invalidate others' views, thus creating rift among Muslims. The present disunity among Muslims is indebted much to the graduates of religious institutions. This is not a biased description of the situation. Indo-Pak sub-continent may serve as a spectacular example of this phenomenon.

Secular Educational Institutions

As a matter of fact, majority of Muslim students join secular educational institutions for obtaining education. These institutions are meant to produce Muslim workers and professionals in various fields, social services, political institutions, finance centers, Medicine, Engineering, Science, Architecture and Technology. Graduates of such institutions are not much different from their counterparts in other communities and nations. The syllabuses of these institutions are all the western oriented representing value free set of mind and culture. The teaching and learning environment there is essentially different from that in religious educational institutions. Everything is looked at and discussed rationally and critically in a bid to make the subject matter and the related issues intelligible and acceptable. The teacher shares in the classes his own understanding of an issue and invites his audience to discuss it freely. The student is generally frank in asking questions and expressing his own view on the matter. Queries,

comments, observation and even criticism of the other views are generally welcome. Rational and scientific arguments to prove or disprove something dominate the secular seat of learning. It is this very reason that the products of these places are more often than not at loggerheads with the rest of the Muslim society. Their way of looking at the thing varies from others including the products of religious institutions. They are not prepared to easily submit to the dictates of the religious leaders. This situation leads to a perennial conflict between two most important components of Muslim community. Secularly educated Muslims seem to be in defying mood on decrees issued by *'ulamā* whose loyalty to their brand of religion may not be doubted. There is hardly any compromise between the two forces on the matter of how to ensure development in the Muslim *ummah*. Religiously educated people always doubt the sincerity of the secularly educated ones.

Religious-cum-Secular Educational Institutions

Such schools and universities as offer both religious and secular studies for the students were not many in the Muslim world until recently. But now the trend to establish such institutions has got momentum. This concept of education is so popular that the old religious institutions are also gradually implementing the twinning program. Certain Arab nations such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq and Jordan may be deemed as pioneers in practically implementing this novel idea. Azhar University, Cairo, which was an institution, right from its inception until recently, devoted to religious studies, changed its centuries old character by adding to its curricula certain secular discipline of studies like Medicine, Engineering, Physical Sciences.¹⁰ Umm al-Qurā University, Makkah is another brilliant example of such experience.¹¹

Axiomatically, these institutions had to give way to two different objectives of their existence. For the religious faculties the old objective equipping the students with the traditional knowledge of Islam was retained and the faculties taking care of secular disciplines were assigned a different task producing Muslim professionals in “non-sacred” fields of life, regardless of the nature of their religious orientation. The curricula and prescribed texts for various parts of the *shari'ah* faculty, its methodology of

teaching and learning and its end products stand very much similar to the purely religious educational institutions. The secular faculties are mere replica of purely secular institutions in the Muslim or non-Muslim world. One may fail to identify any essential difference between the two. The graduates of such twinned educational centers are apparently of two different kinds: religious and secular. The former opts for a very rigid approach to the life-issues and the latter advocates and promotes a totally liberal attitude toward Islamic life, one taking the society to one direction and the other making an effort to lead it to another.

The Outcome

When the students of the above three categories of educational institutions join back the Muslim *ummah*, after completing their targeted span of study, they conceptually form one brotherhood but practically constitute different entities, converting the phenomenon of “unity in diversity” into “diversity in unity”. Having been loaded with different views and approaches, they serve their respective sectarian and partisan interests. The graduates of religious educational institutions get themselves divided into many groups representing their *fiqhī* schools of thought. These *fiqhī* groups find it their sacred hence rewarding task to foment hatred and ill will among Muslims. Each of them believes in its Islamic legitimacy and uprightness referring to others as false and wrong. Their sincerity, devotion, determination, and continuous patience are all for the promotion of the philosophy of life they have been indoctrinated in the alma mater. Likewise, the secularly educated youths strengthen the cause of the camp they originally belong to or form another group with the like minded members of the community. It seems these different groups and camps in the Muslim community have totally forgotten the message of Allah:

O you who have attained to faith! Be conscious of Allah with all the consciousness that is due to Him, and do not allow death to overtake you ere you have surrendered yourselves unto Him. And hold fast, all together, unto the bond with Allah, and do not draw apart from one another. And remember the blessings of Allah upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that

through his blessing you became brethren; and how, when you were on the brink of a fiery abyss, He saved you from it. In this way Allah makes clear His messages unto you, so that you might find guidance, and there might grow out of you a community who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong: and it is they, who will attain to a happy state! And be not like those who have drawn apart from one another and have taken to conflicting views after all evidence of the truth has come unto them: it is they, they who are destined for tremendous suffering. (3:103-105)

And they have developed another message, which is in total contrast with the above. If it is to be put in black and white, it will be read:

O you who are associated with a particular school of Islamic faith and practices! Be conscious of what the leaders of your particular group convey to you with full sincerity and dedication, and do not allow death to overtake you ere you have proved your loyalty to your own brand of faith. And do not hold fast the rope of Allah along with others in the community, and make sure that the rift between you and other components of the *ummah* continues to widen. And forget the blessing of Allah upon you that he brought you together when you were enemies of one another saving you from falling into the abyss of disunity. In this way the message is being made clear to you, so that there might grow out of you many groups who invite unto all that is undesirable, and enjoin the doing of what is wrong and forbid the doing of what is right: and it is these factions who are destined to felicity. And be not like those who have become united and have shunned all conflicting views giving way to the unity of thought after all evidence of the truth has come unto them.

The hatred and enmity among various sections of Pakistani Muslim society has reached a point of no return. *Shī'ites* and *Sunnites* are killing each other. They pounce upon each other wherever and whenever they get the chance to quench their thirst with the blood of the rivals. This uncompromising

approach has reached to a very dangerous level where the very existence of the second largest Muslim nation is at stake. Due to this deplorable state even the political stability in Pakistan, which was formed in the name of unity of faith based on the sovereignty of Allah and the undisputed leadership of the Last Apostle of Allah (*lā ilāha illā Allah Muhammad rasūl al-Allah*), can hardly be achieved. Those responsible for this anarchic situation in the land are the graduates of strictly religious educational institutions. They appear to have effaced the word "tolerance" from the lexicon. The conflict between the secularly educated and the representatives of various religious groups in the contemporary Muslim world does not seem to disappear due to the continued intolerance and rigidity on the part of the players. Almost everywhere the Muslim society is strife-torn between its political elite who are mostly from secular background of education and its religious leaders who are drawn from religiously charged educational institutions. Both the groups blame each other for the decay in the Muslim society. They are almost always prepared to set on each other in a bid to defeat the rival. As a result, the whole Muslim world is falling apart in every respect, culturally, devotionally, politically as well as morally. The educational institutions in the Muslim world are no longer the boon for the society but they have turned bane of the very fabric of the Islamic community.

Islamic Orientation of Education

The present scenario in the Muslim world is highly deplorable. It calls for immediate attention of the right thinking individuals, religious organizations and sincere governments so as to address the problem seriously and take effective steps to arrest further decay of the Muslim mind shaped and oriented by the currently dominating educational system. The present religious and secular system of teaching and learning in the educational institutions in the Muslim world are in urgent need of reorientation along Islamic lines. This exercise should be comprehensive encompassing all the three major components of educational system: objective, curricula and methodology of research, teaching and learning.

Aims and Objectives of Education

It is quite natural for schools, colleges and educational centers to strengthen the hands, which have established them, and are managing them. Educational institutions represent their funding agencies' agenda. During communist era in the 20th century schools and universities set up by socialist governments were aimed at achieving the goal of communism itself. Secular democracies expect from their centers of learning to shape the learner's mind along secular principles. Religious entities want their schools to promote orthodoxy. Aims and objectives of an institution are actually those of the civilization of the people who run it. Islamic schools and universities are to be developed with a view to realizing the goal Islam itself stands for.

Islam seeks to help man recognize Allah, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Provider, and the Keeper of the entire universe. The very first revelation (96:1-5) to the last Prophet (S.A.A.S) serves as an invitation to man to know the Lord of the entire creation. The *Qur'ān* demands from its followers to always remain fully conscious of Him, irrespective of time and situation (3:102). It tells them in no uncertain terms that they are the most dignified and most favored creation on the earth (17:70). It reminds them of their divinely conferred position of Allah's vicegerents (6:165; 10:14; 35:39). It invites them not to forget that most of the universal forces are subservient to them (14:32-33; 16:12; 2:65; 31:20; 45:1-13). It cautions them against ever falling victim to superstitious ideas and practices (9:41). It encourages them to apply rational approach in every thing (3:118; 8:22; 22:46; 25:73). It motivates them to develop a society in which flourish excellent moral values in all walks of life (17:23-37; 23:1-9; 25:63-74). It makes it binding on them to eradicate obstacles towards establishing a civilization where prevail peace and harmony (7:56&85). In order to achieve these aspirations Islam allows its adherents to use all humanly possible means and media including educational institutions. Thus, fundamental aims of schools and colleges in Muslim nations should be as follows:

- 1) To help students recognize Allah truly.
- 2) To enable them to remain always conscious of Allah in all the situations they are in.

- 3) To make them realize that they occupy a highly dignified position on the earth.
- 4) To equip them with rational approaches and methodologies.
- 5) To develop in them high moral values, both individual as well as social.
- 6) To orientate them towards being sincerely devoted to Allah in both spiritual as well as material dimensions of life.

The end product of an educational institution speaks volumes of the objectives of the latter. The graduates of an Islamic university are to be models of Islamic values. What they are will certainly be reflective of their alma mater. If they do not appear to be sincere to Allah and the mankind, their schools may be considered bereft of above-mentioned objectives. Or there is another possibility. The objectives are Islamic, but they serve only as decoration pieces in the educational institution's constitution; the curricula, the environment, and the methodology are all the least representatives of the documented high educational goals.

Underlying Principles of Islamic Education

Islamic principles of education may serve as guidelines for preparing curricula as well as devising certain methodology of teaching and learning. Merely giving Islamic names to schools and universities, and making courses and text-books appear somewhat of Islamic nature may not necessarily render educational system Islamic in spirit. Application of the following principles may shape a system, which may translate Islamic ideal of education into a tangible reality.

1-Unification of So-Called Secular and Sacred Courses

To Muslim mind certain subjects such as *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *taṣawwuf*, theology, Muslim history etc. are sacred and religious, and certain other courses such as physical sciences, math, philosophy, psychology, sociology, information technology etc. are secular and worldly. This dichotomy of knowledge generates two different approaches, one towards religious subjects and the other towards non-religious disciplines of study. This concept of bifurcation may not withstand a scrutiny and critical review of its basis. It seems the basis of this division is willful separation of *al-dīn*

(religion) from *al-duniyā* (materialism). According to general perception the former guarantees blissful life in the Hereafter and the latter leads man away from that. As *al-dīn* is based on the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*, disciplines derived from these two sources are regarded as sacred. And the subjects that do not issue from them are classified as non-sacred or secular. It is a superficial understanding of the messages enshrined in the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. Deep deliberation over Qur'ānic *āyāt* will reveal the fact that the so-called secular subjects are also as sacred as the studies related to the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth*.

Man has been declared as supervisor of the earth (2:30). He has been assigned the task of using, handling and developing the resources (2:36). In order to do justice with his position and issuing responsibilities from there he has to develop knowledge of what is called in the modern age natural and physical sciences. Botany, chemistry, physics, geology, zoology, oceanography, engineering, technology are all sciences that represent man's response to his natural duties.

All that is on the earth and all that is in the heaven have been pressed into service of man (31:20). Now it is unto him whether to derive benefits from them and make the life more and more comfortable, not only material but also devotional and religious. Information technology and mechanical engineering have narrowed down the distance of thousands of kilometers. Hajj is a sacred duty of an able Muslim. Previously, he who lived thousands of miles away from the center of pilgrimage had to embark on a long journey spreading over 1-2 years. But now he can cover this distance within a few hours. Application of modern technology has made the otherwise painful rites of *ḥajj* and *'umrah* easy and comfortable.

Islamic message communication has been enjoined upon individuals (41:33) as well as government agencies (3:104). Mass media and fast transportation system have made this task easy and enjoyable. Development of defense power is a must for those responsible for Islamic nations (8:60). Setting up factories to manufacture arms and ammunitions with state-of-the-art technique is the only viable solution to the defense related weakness of the Muslim world. Latest technology is a boon for Islamic people. The more they use it the stronger they become. Defense is a sacred duty hence the

knowledge facilitating it is certainly sacred.

Reflection on the creation of the heaven and earth is a praiseworthy feature of the people endued with intellectual power (3:191). It is this reflection of scientists, which has led them to the discovery of innumerable hidden realities and thereby to the development of many disciplines of knowledge. Are these disciplines, then, sacred or secular? Reflection is an Islamic act. Materialization of this act in the form of knowledge is undoubtedly Islamic.

Survey of and enquiry about the people on the earth are desirable intellectual activities (22:46; 29:20), which seem to have given birth to many a discipline in Human Sciences such as sociology, history, psychology, geography etc. In the light of above observations it is unwise to refer to physical sciences, technology, engineering and humanities as secular and non-sacred disciplines of study. From Islamic point of view equal emphasis is to be laid on all categories of knowledge whether religious, natural or social. Syed Mawdūdi observes:

Religious and worldly sciences are to be unified by removing the demarcation between them. Division of knowledge into religious and worldly categories is actually consequent upon the concept of separation of religion from the worldly affairs. This concept is essentially un-Islamic. What Islam calls religion is not separated from this world; religion is to look at the world as the kingdom of Allah, consider ourselves His subjects, and behave in the worldly life in accordance with His guidance and pleasure. This concept of Islam requires that all worldly sciences be converted into religious ones. In case there are certain disciplines known as worldly and these are deplete with the idea of submission to God, and there are other subjects called as religious and these are taught in isolation of worldly sciences, a child will, right from the beginning, develop this approach that worldly affair is one thing and the religion is another; He will consider them two different elements, finding it difficult to live a harmonious life by integrating them together so as to demonstrate implementation of the Qur'ānic injunction: enter into Islam wholeheartedly.¹²

Certain elements in physical sciences may be found somewhat objectionable. Such places are to be reviewed and modified in accordance with original Islamic spirit. This is a very delicate task. It is to be carried out by experts and authorities. Ideas and information confining the area of Islamic knowledge to disciplines of *sharī'ah* as available in so-called Islamic sources are to be revised accordingly. Al-Ghazālī's¹³ well-known treatise "*Iḥyā'Ulūmal-Dīn*"¹⁴, for instance, is considered a comprehensive work on the meaning and classification of Islamic sciences. It deals with only religious issues, even though it has briefly praised certain *non-sharī'ah* knowledge as highly desirable.¹⁵ Its impact on Muslim mind is great. This situation needs to be corrected. Inclusion of natural and physical sciences in educational curricula right from primary level is immensely beneficial in removing the dichotomy and in unifying the sacred and the secular subjects of study.

2-Critical and Rational Approach in Teaching and Learning

The most prevalent mode of teaching in the Muslim world today is supply of information as available in classical sources. The teacher hardly talks critically of the material he shares with his students. Students are generally discouraged to ask questions and make their own observations. In case an extraordinarily brilliant student dares to understand something rationally, he is rebuked and his voice stifled. Ṭāhā Ḥusain is a well-known authority in Arabic literature. Once when he made an observation on a certain point in a scholar's *tafsīr* lecture, the *mufasssīr* reacted sharply and, instead of explaining the matter raised, condemned him with the remark: "From where did you learn this blasphemy (*min ayna ta'allamta hadha al-kufr*)?"¹⁶ This is not an isolated case. Educational system in Muslim institutions in general neither demands from the teacher to apply critical and rational approach in his teaching nor allows the students to use their reason while listening to their teacher. Al-Ghazālī (d.505 A.H.) has excluded rational and critical methodology from etiquettes of teaching and learning; he rather considers questions asked by students as obstacles in the way to learning.¹⁷

Man has been endowed with reason and insight. To this refers an *āyah*

55:3-4 (“He has created man: He has taught him an intelligent speech”). The word denoting man's capacity to understand clearly the relations of things and to explain them intelligently is *al-bayān*, which literally means intelligent expression.¹⁸ Man is capable of speaking coherently and meaningfully. It is undoubtedly because of his intellectual capacity. As a corollary of this undeniable fact intellectual power is to be used at every step in the life. There are two extremes of intellectual exercise: misuse or no use. Both are reprehensible. Only proper use of mind is commendable.

Use of intellectual power is so significant in human life that the *Qur'ān* has around forty nine times reminded man of serious consequences of its misuse or no use, on the one hand, and spelled out clearly wonderful impact of its proper use, on the other. Some spectacular examples from these admonitions may bring the point home.

- 1) “Verily, the vilest of creatures in the sight of God are those deaf and dumb ones who do not use their reason”. (8:22)
- 2) “It is He who lays loathsome evil upon those who do not use their reason”. (10:100)
- 3) “We have revealed for you a book in which is a message for you: will you not then apply your reason to understand it”. (21:10)
- 4) “Do they not travel about the earth, so that their hearts and minds may learn wisdom, and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly, it is not their eyes, but their hearts, which are in their breasts”. (22:46)
- 5) “And they will say: Had we but listened or used our reason, we would not be among those who are destined for the blazing flame”. (67:10)

Obviously, as can be seen in the above quoted revealed words of Allah who is the ultimate source of knowledge and wisdom, the success and failure of man in his life depends on how he treats his reason. Education is a very important exercise in his life. Its development or decay is also linked to application or

non-application of his intellectual power. Classroom is like a factory shaping and designing human mind. Methodology of teaching is like a die in which the mind is cast. The end product of an educational institution reflects nature of teaching methodology his teacher has been using in the classes. If the teacher has made reflection on the material he shares with the student, and has not simply passed it on to the latter but rather discussed it in a rational and critical manner making it crystal clear whether it is acceptable or not and on what basis, he will certainly contribute to the development of healthy and sound mind. Teaching methodology bereft of rational and critical approach may not be expected to produce minds useful for the society.

Whether natural sciences or social studies or religious disciplines, these are all to be dealt with in a highly rational and critical manner. *Āyah* 47:24 (“Will they not, then, ponder over the Qur’ān, or is that there are locks upon their hearts”) provides guidelines for the teacher. While preparing his lectures he has not to simply memorize the material he derives from the sources concerned, he has to deliberate over its nature and analyze it thoroughly, using valid and relevant criteria. Another *āyah* 25:73 (“And who, whenever they are reminded of their Sustainer’s messages, do not throw themselves upon them deaf and blind”) advises both the teacher and the student on how to approach the class lecture. Explaining this statement of the *Qur’ān*, al-Zamakhsharī (d.538 A.H.)¹⁹ remarks that whereas the average run of people approach the divine writ with a mere outward show of eagerness, “throwing themselves upon it” for the sake of appearances but in reality not making the least attempt to understand the message as such and, hence, remaining deaf and blind to its contents; the truly God-conscious are deeply desirous of understanding it, and therefore listen to it with wide-awake ears and look into it with seeing eyes.²⁰ Thus the teacher and the students have both to be equally active in the classroom, a venue of intellectual exercise. Blind approach to information, religious or non-religious runs counter to the very concept of education, which is aimed at developing the mind.

3-Continuous Process of Research and Development

Man stands in need of maintaining his identity as an intellectual being on the earth. For that matter he has to continuously widen, strengthen, and develop the knowledge. In order to achieve this goal he has to continuously remain engaged in research. It is the research, which ensures development of knowledge. Apathetic approach to research mars the validity and relevance of knowledge in a given time and space. Educational institutions may not be expected to perform their task of developing mind if these are not strengthened by research in every field of knowledge. Research supplies fresh blood to the body of knowledge. Improper research or no research will certainly cause the body of knowledge to suffer from innumerable problems ultimately leading to its decay, which will, in turn, cause the decay of education system. Prevailing research system in Muslim world does not seem to be research in the Islamic sense of the word.

The *Qur'ān* guides man towards that direction. There are ten places in the *Qur'ān* (2:7; 2:20; 6:46; 16:78; 16:107; 17:36; 23:78; 32:9; 46:26; 67:23) where collective and coordinated role of three essential faculties in man: *al-sam'* (hearing), *al-baṣar* (sight), and *al-fu'ād* (thinking) has been highlighted. For the matter to be clear two of the *āyāt* are quoted here below. "And He has endowed you with hearing and sight, and minds, so that you might have cause to be grateful". (16:78)
 "Verily, the hearing, the sight, the mind—all of them—will be called to account for". (17:36)

Syed Mawdūdī (1903-1979) finds in these *āyāt* a basis for defining knowledge. He says:

The three words *al-sam'*, *al-baṣar*, and *al-fu'ād* have not been used in the divine speech merely in the sense of hearing, seeing and thinking. *Al-sam'* means acquiring information made available by others; *al-baṣar* signifies developing knowledge through self-observation; and *al-fu'ād* stands for deriving conclusions after compiling information obtained by the above-mentioned two means. These three elements constitute knowledge of which man has been made capable.²¹

Interpretation of Syed Mawdūdī seems to be remarkable. Further deliberation over the above-referred āyāt may lead to the conclusion that the mention of three said human faculties is aimed at providing guidelines for research process. It seems that the *Qur'ān* spells out about three stages of research. Firstly, all the available information in a particular field of study is to be accessed, read, and understood. Secondly, the existing information is to be analyzed critically, interpreted thoroughly, and clarified fully about what is what. Thirdly, new vistas of knowledge are to be explored; new discoveries are to be made; and the existing volume of information is to be expanded.

This principle had been applied by Muslims of golden Islamic era when the knowledge bloomed fully. Muslims acquired available amount of knowledge in almost all the fields of learning, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, logic, philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, physics, optics, architecture, engineering, mathematics, algebra etc. They studied these disciplines carefully and minutely, obtained mastery over them. Then, they moved to the second stage of the process of learning and research: observation and critical analysis. After accomplishing the task of observation and analysis they devoted their time and energy to delve into the vast and untouched ocean of knowledge to increase the quantity of knowledge.

In the past Muslim educational institutions observed this principle of research, which ensured the development of knowledge. In order to achieve this goal they traveled far and wide throughout the known human world, learned foreign language to obtain the intellectual legacy from others, translated the unknown foreign works into Arabic language to let the Muslim students have easy access to the sources, modified them in accordance with their philosophy and made utmost endeavor to come up with something more and new in the fields mentioned above.

It is noteworthy that the West applied the same principle of research and reached where they are today in almost every possible fields of study and learning. Muslims' decline in the field of education seems to have been caused by their lukewarm approach and indifference towards the *Qur'ānic* principle. The dominance of the West in education is its adherence to the

Islamic policy of research, which is actually a universal methodology of learning.

Muslims feel satisfied by memorizing the existing quantity of information. They think that they have completed the task of learning and deserve to be called scholars and authority. In both religious and secular educational institutions in the Muslim world the teachers and the students are required to concentrate on only getting and absorbing the works already done by Muslim scholars in the past. It is not all; they have to undergo another two stages of the academic task: analytical cum critical observation of what exists and further development of knowledge. These institutions have become mere supermarkets selling available old commodities. That is why educational institutions in the Muslim world have ceased to progress. Every part of its machinery has turned static and rusty hence hackneyed and outdated requiring an urgent replacement with new and viable system. University teachers have to be engaged in continuous process of research in their fields of interest. Then only can they do justice with their position and assignment. Their confinement to the existing quantity of information or the old form of knowledge amounts to making an effort to drive the academic vehicle back to the old era. Today's Muslim world is the part of the global community. They have equal opportunity to obtain knowledge by using state of the art information technology. They will still have to travel far and wide around the earth but not by making physical journey. Electronic media are at the door of Muslims to serve them better if they want to be served.

4-Refurbishing and Reorientation of Disciplines of Study

Change is in the nature of man, though he is incapable to change his own nature. He therefore affects changes in the world outside his being. Changes that have been taking place in the material world until now reflect man's treatment of the life. These changes in the human environment are bound to influence educational institutions from almost all angles including curricula. Courses of study should reflect need of the time. Maintaining outdated and irrelevant disciplines makes no sense. It is mere waste of time and energy. It seems quite wise to continuously review existing courses, on the one hand,

and introduce new disciplines in the curricula, on the other.

In the Muslim world today religious curricula are *fiqh* oriented; *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and other disciplines are treated only as means of jurisprudence. This situation needs change. But it is a very delicate hence too difficult task to review the curricula in all the areas of study. Extra vigilance and deep study of the situation constitute the basis of this exercise. Experts' committees are required to be formed to carry out this heavy responsibility. While excluding or including a subject of study in the recommended curricula it is to be pondered whether this or that discipline of studies are relevant and viable to the Muslim world; practically irrelevant and dead subjects are to be sidelined. For example, logic, philosophy and theology are still offered in religious educational institutions, and these subjects have lost their significance in the contemporary world hence these may be excluded from the syllabuses. Likewise, from the list of so-called secular disciplines either in the human sciences or physical sciences irrelevant and less advantageous disciplines may be done away with. It may not be difficult to identify extraneous courses of study. Priority is another principle in arranging the syllabuses. For instance, in religious institutions priority should be given to *Qur'ānic* and *ḥadīth* studies; emphasis is to be laid on the understanding of the messages directly from the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* literature. Currently, both the sources of Islamic law are studied in educational institutions from the perspective of jurisprudence. It is not a desirable situation. This approach to and preference of *fiqhī* thoughts have been found dangerously detrimental to the Muslim mind. The subject of *fiqh* may also be thoroughly reviewed. In human sciences history, economics, business administration and library sciences may be given preferences. In the field of Science and Technology similar changes may be made.

The selection of textbooks and reading material for various disciplines of study is an intrinsic part of the curricula. The nature of subject is determined by the nature of text included. It is an intensive agenda. In religious disciplines comprehensive change of the textbooks seems to be the only viable solution of the problem. But the textbooks in secular disciplines

may require only relevant modifications instead. Writing of new relevant textbooks in both the areas is an undeniably necessary assignment in the educational scheme.

5-Teacher-Student Relationship

In the modern civilization nature of relationship between the teacher and the taught does not count. But in Islamic scheme of education it holds a very crucial position. In the present world education is an industry; the teacher is a salesman and the student is a buyer. Islam may not allow its educational institutions to turn into business centers. It considers the teacher as guide (*murshid*), and the student as seeker (*tālib*). Both are to be sincere in their attitude towards each other. The relationship between the two is to be governed by certain Qur'ānic principles.

The *Qur'ān* has used a number of terms to draw a comprehensive and clear picture of its scheme of life. These are of various categories. Certain terms represent the nature of acts to be carried out in Islamic life, and some other terms serve as underlying principles. *'Adl* (justice), *ihsān* (excellence), *jihād* (utmost endeavor), and *taqwā* (God-consciousness) are the most important underlying principles for life as suggested by the Qur'ān. These principles generally stand misinterpreted hence misunderstood. According to general perception, *'adl* is an act to be carried out only in the court of law, *ihsān* is applicable in social life, *jihād* has a role to play in the battlefield, and *taqwā* is a form to be demonstrated in mosque and devotional matters. These principles are of general and universal nature. Their applicability transcends the limitations of time and place. Educational places are also to be governed by these principles. Teacher-student relationship is to be established and strengthened further on the basis of these above-mentioned principles.

The prophet (S.A.A.S.) was a teacher for mankind (62:2). While addressing his followers he once observed: "My position among you is that of your father".²² Since the Prophet (s.a.w.) is the role model for Muslims, he is to be followed by the teacher in his teaching profession. The teacher has to interact with his students in the way their biological fathers treat them. A father loves his children and is always concerned about their welfare; he wants to see them developing from all angles, physically, emotionally,

morally, and intellectually. The teacher has also to feel concerned about how to ensure his students' growth, mentally as well as morally.

One of the attributes of the Prophet (s.a.w.) as mentioned in the *Qur'ān* is gentleness. *Āyah* 3:159 reads: "And it was by Allah's grace that you deal gently with your followers: if you had been severe and harsh hearted, they would indeed have broken away from you". It is clear from this *āyah* that the secret of the Prophet's success, among other things, was his gentle and kind approach to his disciples. A teacher who has the mission of imparting knowledge to his students has to act in the same manner so as to ensure success in his task.

The *Qur'ān* condemns Jewish scholars and priests for their dubious character in these words: "Do you bid other people to be pious, the while you forget your own selves – and yet you recite the divine writ? Will you not, then, use your reason?" (2:44). A Muslim teacher's conduct, whether in public or in privacy, should correspond to his assertions. If the teacher's person does not reflect Islamic character, students may not be expected to be sincere to him in learning from him. This disturbance of relationship between the teacher and the taught may disturb the whole process of education, causing students to feel confused.

Conclusion

The above reflection leads to an understanding that educational institutions in the Muslim world have to review their system of education streamlining it along certain Islamic objectives and principles. The objective, in short, should be to produce healthy Muslim mind, representing Islamic thought and life-pattern. The major principles that are to govern the entire machinery of education are 1) unification of so-called religious and secular curricula, 2) rational and critical approach in teaching and learning, 3) continuous process of research and development based on three point formula--acquisition of available knowledge, observation of and in-depth enquiry into the validity of existing knowledge, and development of new form and substance of knowledge, 4) refurbishing and reorientation of disciplines of study, and 5) teacher-student relationship governed by *Qur'ānic* principles of *'adl*, *ihsān*, kindness, and integrity of character.

Notes and References

1. The *Qur'ān*, 42:13. This *āyah* speaks very clearly about the mission of the prophets including the last one. It is to establish *al-dīn*. Generally the word *al-dīn* is translated as religion (see 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's translation) or faith (see Muhammad Asad's translation). It is an error. This word literally signifies retribution, habit, submission, accountability, dominance, supremacy, power, command, behavior, mode of life, path etc. (see, al-Fīrozābādī, Muhammad ibn Ya'qūb, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīt*, Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Aabī, Beirut, 1997, vol. 2, p. 1575), and technically refers to Islam. In order to understand what Islam is one has to see what the Prophet (S.A.A.S.) achieved in his life. He established a full-fledged Islamic society in Arabian Peninsula, which continued flourishing for several centuries. That society was not merely a religious one but it also represented Islamic principles in all walks of human life, social, moral, political, economic, cultural, military, international relations, and educational etc. It, then, simply means that what the Prophet (s.a.w.) established was *al-dīn*, hence its rendering into English should be Islamic civilization instead of religion or faith, which is just one dimension of *al-dīn*.
2. The *Qur'ān*, 4:105 ("We have sent down to you the Book in truth, so that you may judge between people in accordance with what Allah has taught you"), and the *Qur'ān*, 6:38 ("No single thing have We neglected in the Book".)
3. The *Qur'ān*, 7:5 ("We had certainly sent unto them a Book, based on knowledge, which we explained in detail".) One of the attributive names of the *Qur'ān* is al-'ilm i.e. knowledge (see, 4:14).
4. The *Qur'ān*, 17:36 ("And never concern yourself with anything of which you have no knowledge".)
5. The *Qur'ān*, 2:3 ("And yet among men there are such as dispute about Allah, without knowledge, and follow every Satan, obstinate in rebellion".)
6. It is clearly written in the constitution of the institution. It is also well

- known that this school of religious studies was set up with the sole purpose of promoting the cause of *Hanafite* school of jurisprudence.
7. Islamic University Madinah was established in 1961. For more information the website may be visited. *Ahl al-ḥadīth* is a term used for those individuals or group of individuals who do not follow either of the four main schools of *fiqh* and believe that *ḥadīth* literature is sufficient to guide the Muslims in their juridical matters. It is very strong movement in the Muslim world. Islamic University Madinah serves this agenda. For more information the website www.ahlussunnah.net/scholars.htm may be visited.
 9. Iṣlāhī, Amīn Aḥsan, *Tadabbur-e- Qur'ān*, Taj Co., Delhi, 1997, vol. 1, Muqaddimah, p. 15.
 10. The secular disciplines of study were included in al-Azhar in 1961. For more information the www.islamfortoday.com/alazhar.htm and www.Britannica.com/seo/a/al-azhar may be visited.
 11. Please, visit the website www.saudinf.com/main/j42.htm
 12. Mawdūdī, Syed Abū al-A'lā, *Ta'līmāt* (Markazi Maktaba Islami, Delhi, 1991), pp. 69-70.
 13. He is Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad Abū Ḥāmid al Ghazālī, famous theologian and Islamic thinker of 5th century after *hijrah*. He was born in 450 A.H. and died in 505 A.H.
 14. *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of Religious Sciences) is one of many works of al-Ghazālī. It deals with almost all fundamental issues of Islamic law such as knowledge, purity, *ṣolāt*, *zakāt*, fasting, *ḥajj*, individual moral values, repentance etc. Most of the discussions in this book are based on Qur'ānic *āyāt*, *ḥadīth*, views of the Prophet's companions, opinions of scholars from *tābi'ūn* generation, and utterances of previous prophets such as Moses and Jesus.
 15. Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid, *Iḥyā' 'Ulū al-Dīn* (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, Beirut, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 16. The scholar has counted Medicine, Mathematics, Agriculture, Embroidery, Tailoring etc. under the category of socially obligatory knowledge.
 16. Al-Jundī, Anwar, *Tāhā Husain: Ḥayātuhū wa Fikruhū* (Dār al-

I'tiṣām, Egypt, 1977), p. 21. The lecturer was al-Shaikh Salīm al-Basharī. When he was one day explaining *āyah* 6:111 (“*And even if We were to send down angels unto them, and if the dead were to speak unto them, and if We were to assemble before them all the things, they would still not believe unless Allah so willed*”). in his *tafsīr* class, Tāhā Ḥusain, who was there attending to the lecture along with a French scholar, observed: “This is entirely fatalism”. The teacher brushed aside this remark and declared enquirer's comment a blasphemy (*min aina ta'allamta hādhā al-kufr* i.e. from where did you learn this blasphemous idea?).

17. Al-Ghazālī, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 52-53.
18. I-Fīrozābādī, op. cit., vol. 2, p.1555.
19. He is Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Zamakhsharī (467-538 A.H.), a great scholar of the *Qur'ān*. His *tafsīr* work briefly known as *Al-Kashshāf* is of immense value.
20. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, 1980), p. 558.
21. Mawdūdī, op. cit., pp. 57-58.
22. Al-Sijistānī, Sulaimān ibn al-Ash'ath, Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan* (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1996), vol. 1, *kitāb al-ṭahārah*, p. 43, *ḥadīth* no. 8.