



Islamisation of Knowledge and Contributions of Muslim Scholars in Science and Technology

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Abstract

Islamisation of knowledge means practising i.e. discovering, compiling, piecing together, communicating and publishing intellectual activities based on Islamic concept of the universe, life and man. This paper examines the rationale, scope and core issues for Islamisation of knowledge. Finally, we assess the contributions of Muslim scholars in science and technology. The major conclusions drawn from this paper were: there is no doubt that Islam is relevant to all aspect of thinking, living or being. This relevance must be articulated, correctly in each discipline. The textbook used must be rewritten, establishing the discipline on integral aspect of the Islamic vision of reality. Moreover Muslim teachers have to be trained in the use of new textbooks and Muslim Universities, Colleges and Schools transformed in order to resume their pioneering leadership in the world of Islam and history.

Keyword: Islamisation, knowledge, education, Arabic, scholars.

Introduction

Islamisation of knowledge is a course that takings position on two crucial stages, theoretical and practical. The theoretical level which may attend as an overview to the next clarify the scopes, reasons aims and core points of the course and classifies ways of applying them in all the dissimilar parts of knowledge.

It also demonstrates the general position of the Quran and other Islamic teachings in relation to modern science; casts light on the legacy of Islamic elements can be identified and endeavours to trace the factors that have led to the unfortunate discrepancy between Islamic contexts of this legacy.

The present day efforts to Islamic knowledge followed the realisation by Muslims especially after World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mecca in 1977, that the central problem of education in Muslim societies is its dual nature that is the existence of two parallel systems, the Quranic and Islamic educational system on the other. These two systems have obvious differing historical and conceptual backgrounds.

Islamisation of knowledge means the impact or significance of the process of Islamisation on the concept and pursuit of knowledge. Islamisation can only proceed from knowledge. Without knowledge there is no Islam, during the initial revelation of the Holy Quran. Whatever was revealed to mankind by Allah through The Prophet Mohammed (SAW) was soon implemented by the Prophet and his Companions (Sahaba)¹.

Even now, every Muslim is supposed to learn the Holy Quran and the examples of the Prophet (Sunnah) comprehend them and act according to their teaching. It is the Islamic knowledge that shown a brilliant light which ushered in the golden period of the Islamic civilisation that permeated the world between 796AD and 1650AD. By using the term Islamisation of knowledge, we seek to emphasise the fact that transformation of knowledge from whatever it was before to an Islamic one is the most significant milestone to Islamisation that is changing a Muslim society to a completely Islamic one².

Islamisation of knowledge undertaking is regarded by an increasing number of Muslim scholars and thinkers as the ultimate cure to the Muslim Ummah's multidimensional problems, whether they may be economic, political, social or intellectual. In view of the foregoing therefore, the major objectives of this paper were: i. To discuss the meaning and historical antecedents of Islamisation of knowledge. ii. Examine the rationale and scope for Islamisation of knowledge. iii. Analyse the core issues of Islamisation of knowledge. iv. Assess the contributions of Muslims scholars in sciences and technology.

Meaning of Islamisation of Knowledge: Islamisation of knowledge means practising i.e. discovering, compiling, piecing together, communicating and publishing intellectual activities based on Islamic concept of the universe, life and man. When placed in such a setting, it becomes harmonious and logically consistent so that all knowledge outside this framework is seen to be in conflict with the laws of nature and with reality. We shall realise that Islamisation is a logically sound activity if we

remember that acquiring knowledge is a process of adding or empowering of the intellect.

More precisely, we can describe it as man's intellectual ability to master the physical biological, spiritual and human phenomena contained within the universe, the world and life. It was Allah (SWT) Who created man and breathed into him of his spirit, who granted him his intellectual, sensory and bodily powers.

He created life and universe, which he filled with phenomena, being creatures and things and made for them laws which govern their lives. He gave them power and energy subjected them all to man. Islamisation of knowledge does not only deal with the context of the pure and applied sciences and their relation to existence and life is also of necessity includes humanities. In fact the latter are even more vital, because they are concern with determining man's position in this world and regulating his life so that he can fulfil his mission on earth³.

Historical Antecedents of the Islamisation of Knowledge:

The current Islamisation of knowledge is in essence similar to the significant effort inspired by Al-Mamun, the seventh Abbasid Caliph (813 – 833AD) which heralded the golden era of the Islamic civilisation that lasted for nearly 1,000 years howdid it happen? The Holy Quran which was revealed to mankind through Prophet Mohammed (SAW) started with a command given to the Prophet to read.

Throughout the twenty three years (610 – 633 AD) of its revelation, the teachings of the Quran were recited to the believers who translated it in practical life the Prophet leading in this effort. Thus a foundation of faith as well as social, economic, political and intellectual development ensued. After the death of the Prophet (SAW), the acquisition of Quranic knowledge went hand in hand with its implementation during the Caliphates of Abubakar Al-Siddiq Umar Al-Khattab, Usman bin Affan and Ali IbnAbi-Talib i.e. four rightly guided Caliphs⁴.

During this period, the Quran was collected and compiled in the form it is today. During the successive Umayyad and Abbasid governments, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) were collected, sifted and compiled. The stage for harmonising the Quranic knowledge with other knowledge such as the legacy of Greek and Persian Literature was set by Al-Mamun, the seventh Abbasid Caliph (813 – 833AD) who established a research centre Baitul-Hikmah. Scholars from far and near converged on this centre studying, translating works into Arabic and compiling treatises. Al-Mamun imported manuscripts of particularly important works that did not exist in the Islamic countries from Byzantium. Developing an interest in the sciences as well the established observatories at which Muslim scholars could verify the astronomic knowledge handed down from antiquity⁵.

Subsequently, to this pioneering effort was the development of original works by a number of Muslim researchers. Yakub Al-kind studied Greek science and composed 265 treatises on music, astronomy and medicine. He also harmonised the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. TabitIbn Quran (b.A.C 826) and Al-Bathani (877 – 918AD) were considered the greatest Muslim geometrician and trigonometrician respectively.

Al-Razi (865 – 930AD) was the greatest writer on medicine. He introduced the use of minoratives and is said to have invented the sextant and discovered the nerve of the laryanx. His scientific output amounted to more than 200 works, half of which were medical. His treatise on smallpox and measles presented the first clear account of these diseases. This work was translated into Latin, English and other languages⁶.

Rationale for Islamisation of Knowledge: One fundamental Islamic principle that permeates all Muslims activities is the unity of Allah (Tauhid). Everything that a Muslim does had to be linked with Allah, being conscious of Allah as explained by Oyekan, (1982) means seeing Allah's hand in everything around, linking all facts of creation to him, aligning all our deeds with his code of conduct relating to all affairs to him, acknowledging his might, glorifying him in order words, remembering Allah at all times in all places and during all activities. Allah describes men of understanding as those who remember Allah, standing, sitting and reclining Surah 3, verse 191, Allah says:

“And verily the remembrance of Allah is the greatest (deed) (Surah 29, verse 45)”.

The reported words of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also drive home some point. Abu Huraira reported the Messenger of Allah (SAW) as saying – The world is accursed and what it contains is accursed, except remembrance of Allah and what He likes, a learned man or a learner (Transmitted by Tirmidhi and IbnMajah).

Ibn Umar reported the Prophet (SAW) as saying do not speak much without mentioning Allah for much talk without mention of Allah produces hardness of heart and the one who is farthest from Allah is he who has a hard heart.

The above words of Allah and His Prophet (SAW) all go to emphasise that all we do we have to remember Allah i.e. All knowledge to be useful in the Islamic context must be linked with Allah, the originator of all existence. Therefore, the interpretation of any sets of data and observations must conform to the Divine Trusts outline in the Quran.

There is no doubt that Islam is relevant to all aspects of thinking of living or being. This relevance must be articulated unmistakably in each discipline. The textbooks used must be rewritten, establishing the discipline as an integral aspect of the Islamic vision of reality. Moreover, Muslim teachers have to be

trained in the use of new textbooks and Muslim Universities, Colleges and Schools transformed in order to resume their pioneering leadership in world of history. This is the rationale for Islamisation of knowledge⁷.

Scope for Islamisation of Knowledge: Knowledge from the point of view of Islam is classified into two categories that is: i. Basic knowledge derived directly from the Quran and Sunnah and ii. Knowledge acquired by man primarily with the help of his intellect and experiments.

However, these two are always integrated the essence of this integration of knowledge is that man according to Islam is Allah's deputy and all the things around him belong to Allah. Allah has chosen him to make use of these things for his benefit and in this lays his test and trial. Then Allah will examine him in a second life (thereafter) and this examination will cover both his individual and social life. In order to attain the integration between Islamic and secular education as suggested above, a work plan for Islamisation of knowledge has been agreed upon as proposed by late Professor Ismail Al-Faruqi (1982). It is presented as follows:

Mastery of Modern Discipline: Discipline of knowledge must be understood and explained in simple terms in accordance with the dominant themes, principles and problems.

Discipline Survey: Every discipline must be measured and essays written on it to lay plain the general outlines of its basis and historical development and the core involvements which its great votaries have completed.

Mastery of Islamic Legacy: It is necessary to discover the legacy of the ancestors must remain for us the starting point of relevance of Islam⁸. Those issues which promise to the problems of the present ought to be the object of Islamic education and research approach.

Analysis: In order to bring the achievements of Islamic legacy closer to the understanding of the western trained Muslim Scholar, it is necessary to do more than anthologies.

Vision: Historical analysis of the contributions of the legacy will illuminate many areas of Islamic vision. Those issues which promise relevance to the problems of the present ought to be highlighted.

Establishment of Specific Relevance of Islam to Disciplines: The foregoing 3 steps amount to posing a problem to the Islamic thinker together they sum up for him the development of the discipline. Three major questions must be posed and answers to them found. The first, what did the Islamic legacy of learning from the Quran to the modernists, contribute to the whole range of issues envisaged by the discipline? Second, how does the Islamic legacy is contributing to the discipline compare or contrast with the accomplishment of the discipline? Where has

the legacy fulfilled or fallen short of? Third, is identifying areas or issues in which the Islamic legacy has given little or nothing.

Critical Assessment of Modern Discipline: The discipline's dominant themes and problems ought to be critically related to the methodology as well as its frontline objectives. Such state of art account of the discipline should shed the necessary light upon areas where one or another kind of Islamic correction, amendment, addition or elimination is necessary.

Survey of the Ummah's Major Problems: The Ummah today is confronted with formidable problems on all fronts, economic, social, political, intellectual and moral. This requires empirical survey and critical analysis. The knowledge of the authority should be carried to tolerate upon the Ummah's difficulties i.e. to enable the Muslims to recognize them properly⁹.

Creative Analysis and Synthesis: Having understood and mastered the modern disciplines as well as the Islamic legacy having assessed their strengths and weaknesses. It is now period for the Islamic bra into make its inventive leap. An inventive production must be hit between Islamic heritage and the contemporary disciplines which would bridge over the gap of centuries of non-development.

Dissemination of Islamisation Knowledge: Every work produced under the above 1 – 8 should be placed in the hand of every Muslim academic and thinker as a personal invitation to join in this establishment. It is equally important to place such products in the Universities and Colleges of the Muslim world with the request to consider them for possible adoption as required readings in the pertinent courses of institution¹⁰.

Core Issues on Islamisation of Knowledge: Proponents for the Islamisation of knowledge strongly assert that the individual has a crucial role to play and it is he or she who need to be islamised and whose mind needs to be sharpened and oriented to think in an Islamic way¹¹. Scholars who argue for the Islamisation of individuals and knowledge centred that while this argument is sound in so far as the importance of individuals to the Islamisation of knowledge undertaking is concern. It fails to recognise the critical importance of the task of Islamising the body of knowledge itself.

There are some debates in Islamisation of knowledge circles which approach top-down or bottom up would best serve the undertaking in both the short term and long term. Those in the top-down school argue that the undertaking is essentially a research and intellectual effort that should be confined in the initial stages to higher institutions particularly Universities¹². The reason behind this is that the initial tasks are mainly in the area of philosophy and methodology which are best handled through scholarly discourses and discussions by academics and researchers in Universities¹³.

Those who are proponents of the bottom-up approach argue that we cannot wait for the entire tasks of Islamisation of knowledge of all disciplines to be completed before we apply the result to Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutions¹⁴. The debate on neutrality of knowledge is important to the Islamisation of knowledge undertaking because it is on the basis of its resolution that the justification for the undertaking can either be dismissed or endorsed. Proponents for the neutrality of knowledge argue that knowledge is totally universal, neutral and value free. It is therefore the collective property of humanity as a whole irrespective of where it is derived and who deserve it. Some of the opponents of the neutrality of knowledge go to the extent of saying that the entire exercise of deriving knowledge is not of getting new facts and truths about the world but perceiving the world in particular ways to a given world view¹⁵.

Discussion

The major objectives of this paper was to discuss the meaning and historical antecedents of Islamisation of knowledge. The paper examines the rationale and scope for Islamisation of knowledge. Furthermore, we present the core issues of Islamisation of knowledge and contributions of Muslim scholars in sciences and technology.

Conclusion

The major conclusions drawn from this paper were: proponents for Islamisation of knowledge strongly asserts that the individual has a crucial role to play and it is he or she who need to be Islamised, whose mind needs to be shaped and oriented to think in an Islamic way. There is no doubt that Islam is relevant to all aspect of thinking of living or being. This relevance must be articulated unmistakably in each discipline. The textbooks used must be rewritten, establishing the discipline on integral aspect of the Islamic vision of reality. Moreover Muslim teachers have to be trained in the use of new textbooks and Muslims Universities, Colleges and schools transformed in order to resume their pioneering leadership in the world of Islamisation and history.

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