

Islamization of Education

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After World War II, most colonized Muslim countries achieved independence. During their days of struggle for independence, all major political parties in Muslim lands had committed themselves to liquidate their inherited, ill-conceived, divisive, and un-Islamic systems of education and to replace them with truly Islamic ones. But after independence, while politicians in power (constrained for whatever reasons) remained reluctant to bring about the promised changes, academics were, by and large, not clear as to how to Islamize education. The most that they could propose was installation of lame-duck departments of Islamic studies within the inherited systems, established parallel to the predominantly secular departments, thereby perpetuating a discredited, dualistic form of education that was generating split personalities among the Muslim youth.

This remained the shape of education in the Islamic world during decades after independence in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. It was in these circumstances that King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah/Makkah, under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Muhammad Abduh Yamani and Dr. Abdullah Omar Nasseef obtained approval from the then king, Khalid bin Abdulaziz, to hold the First World Conference on Islamic Education in Makkah. For two years, its organizing committee under the chairmanship of Shaykh Ahmad Salah Jamjoom and comprising Professor Syed Ali Ashraf, Dr. Abdullah Muhammad Zaid, and Dr. Ghulam Nabi Saqeg, worked day and night, along with renowned colleagues such as Professor Muhammed Qutb, Professor Muhammad Al-Mubarak (now deceased), Professor Hussain Hamed Hassan, and others to examine all issues related to the task. The Conference held in Makkah al-Mukarramah in 1977 was a tremendous event. Attended by some 350 Muslim scholars from

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all over the world, it called for research that would rediscover the original Islamic concepts and objectives that would lead to the establishment of a comprehensive education of today's Muslim youth. Four follow-up conferences were held in the 1980s (in Islamabad in 1980, in Dhaka in 1981, in Jakarta in 1982, and in Cairo in 1985), elaborated on the major themes that were established in 1977, and provided a basic framework for the Islamization of education. As a direct consequence of the 1977 Conference, the World Centre for Organization of Islamic Education was set up in Makkah al-Mukarramah in 1981, under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), to spearhead conceptual research and implement blueprints and recommendations of the conference. Sadly, soon after its inauguration, the Centre was merged into the Umm al-Qura (Makkah) campus, thus losing its international character. But the revolution that the Conference had set in motion continued silently.

So often in Islamic history, after Muslim political authorities bungle the affairs of the ummah, the Muslim scholars and *awliya* Allah (Sufi teachers) carry on the work to regenerate and invigorate Islam by restoring the supremacy of God-given Islamic law and values, and steering the ummah away from future disasters. And so, in that tradition Muslim scholars are continuing their efforts to serve Allah's cause through education and *da'wah*.

In the United States in 1982, Allah enabled Shaheed Professor Ismail Ragi al-Faruqi, with his life-long Islamic commitment and clarity of vision, to formulate and launch the work plan of the Islamization of Knowledge. As a direct result the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT; in Herndon, Virginia) was established to investigate the epistemological and philosophical bases as well as theoretical and practical implications of Islamizing knowledge. Later the international Islamic universities in Dhaka, Islamabad, Kuala Lumpur, Kampala, and Niger were set up to teach and promote research on various aspects of the Islamization thesis and its work plan. Professor Syed Ali Ashraf, another pioneer of the movement, joined Cambridge University where he established the Islamic Academy and started publication of the *Muslim Education Quarterly*. I was assigned to the University of London, Institute of Education, where, for twelve years I have taught postgraduate courses and supervised higher degree research on the history and philosophy of Islamic education and the educational problems of the contemporary Muslim world. These early efforts have directly led to a worldwide recognition of the subject of Islamic education. In major universities in the West, many Muslim and non-Muslim students are currently studying those knowledge concepts and value systems of Islam that are universally applicable and that could enrich modern education worldwide. Within the last ten years, I have personally examined over a

dozen doctoral dissertations on various aspects of the subject of Islamic education submitted to universities around the world.

However, up to this point the crucial task of producing school syllabi, textbooks, and guidelines to help teachers in the schools had not been performed. Educators felt the urgency to make a breakthrough in this direction, and the Sixth International Conference at Cape Town aimed to do just that. It followed from an earlier international seminar held jointly by the Islamic College of London and Cape Town, in Cape Town in October 1994, under the auspices of the Islamic Textbooks International. At this seminar, a five-year work plan was agreed upon to produce Islamic textbooks for use in Muslim schools (in the first instance, within English-speaking countries). That plan had, however, to be held in abeyance for lack of funds.

The Sixth Conference was a trend setter in more ways than one. It was organized more as a workshop than as a paper-reading conference. Its entire focus was on Islamizing the syllabus by preparing working documents for its design and by teaching guidelines and INSET programs. The workshop sessions were also linked to and informed by the five earlier Islamic education conferences, research and writings of the IIIT, and similar other forums. In order to combine the conceptual and the practical aspects, the Conference was divided into two types of sessions: the plenaries, in which senior scholars and those involved in the elucidation of the Islamization rationale were invited to present their views and reviews; and the practical workshop sessions, which were divided into 12 subject areas—Islamic studies, Arabic, arts and crafts, junior primary subjects, mathematics, history, geography, English, biology, science, commerce, and physical science. To keep close to the actual classroom situation, experienced teachers from various South African Muslim schools were invited to participate in the workshop sessions. To form discussion documents, these teachers had prepared sample lesson plans on different subjects which they had been teaching at various levels in South African schools and which conformed to the South African curriculum. Each subject session was chaired by a subject specialist and attended by academics as well as teachers who together evaluated these sample lessons, discussed specific ways to Islamize them, and forwarded their formulations to a review committee composed of senior scholars who then responded with their comments. The scrutinized and annotated sample lessons will be reformulated by groups of South African teachers who are charged with streamlining them on the basis of insights gained from the group discussions and comments made by specialists. Final subject guidelines will then be produced which should be helpful for teachers and used in Muslim schools. Hopefully, based on these guidelines, suitable teaching materials and textbooks will be produced, thereby encouraging grass-roots implementation.

The Conference participants included veteran educationists from all over the world and was organized by the Association of Muslim Schools of South Africa represented by its chairman, Muhammad Docrat, a prominent South African businessman. The Conference's host, the Islamia College, Cape Town, is under the leadership of its visionary principal, Mawlana Ali Adam, who has wisely built the Islamia College up from humble beginnings to international recognition. The opening ceremony of the Conference took place at the lavish settings of City Hall. Many distinguished South African dignitaries were present, including Professor S. Bengu and Abdullah Omar, the South African ministers for education and justice, respectively, as well as other government officials and noted dignitaries from Cape Town. The overseas delegation was led by Dr. Muhammad Abduh Yamani, former minister for information, Saudi Arabia, and currently chairman of Iqra International Charitable Trust headquartered in Jeddah.

The inauguration program began with a recitation from the Holy Qur'an by Shaykh Azaam Najjar, a scholar from Islamia College. The youthful Ahmed Ayoub Chohan, a distinguished local attorney who has been closely associated with the Islamia College from its inception and who is currently the vice chairman of its governing body, acted as the master of ceremonies. The welcoming address was delivered by Abdulrazzak Osman, chairman of the governing body, a prominent local businessman whose patronage and leadership have won the entire Cape Muslims over to the support of the college. The convener of the conference, Mawlana Ali Adam, hailed the occasion as a milestone in the history of Muslims in the region, particularly concerning their educational development. He reminded the audience of apartheid times when, as a ten-year-old boy, he was arrested for no other "crime" than straying into the prohibited "whites only" area of the town. In those early times, he reminisced, when Muslims were brought to the Cape either as slaves from the East Indies by the Dutch colonizers or as indentured laborers by the British, they were not allowed to bring into the country a copy of the Holy Qur'an and could only assemble for prayers at night. It was in such conditions that Shaykh Yusuf and Tuan Guru (religious teacher) made a start in Islamic education in secret sessions. As a *hafiz*, the Tuan Guru himself wrote a copy of the Qur'an and taught it to young and old in Masjid al-Awwal, the first mosque in the Cape. Later, during the apartheid years, Islamic education continued to flourish within the mosques, which were founded and funded entirely by the Muslim communities. But the dark chapter of racial and religious hatred of South African history, stressed the Mawlana, was now over for good. Muslims, he asserted, were looking forward to contributing to the emergent peaceful and forward looking, multicultural South Africa by means of their unique, unprejudiced Islamic values of peace and harmony applicable to

all peoples. On behalf of President Nelson Mandela and his government, the South African minister for education extended to the participants a warm welcome, and assured them that his ministry was looking forward to receiving the proceedings and recommendations of this conference and benefiting from the Islamic concepts of education. He assured the audience that the South African government was committed to giving full freedom to the Muslim communities in setting up their schools and teaching the Islamic faith within the framework of the national constitution and the laws of the country. The minister of justice, himself a Cape Town Muslim leader, further added to the edification of the Muslims by reiterating the government's resolve to maintain law and order and to give all the country's peoples their due rights and liberties. In his address, Dr. Yamani thanked the South African president, the ministers for education and justice, and the hosts of the Conference for their very warm welcome to the beautiful city of Cape Town. As the original sponsor of the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah in 1977, he thanked Almighty Allah for the progress made in Islamic education since then. The opening ceremony was enlivened by the melodious Arabic *nashīds* (lyrics) and *naats* (songs of praise for the Prophet of Islam) sung in perfect Arabic style by the ten-year-old Rabia, a pupil from the Islamia College.

After the inauguration of the Conference on Friday, September 20, participants were taken to the new site of the Islamia College where the foundation stone was laid by Dr. Mohammed Abduh Yamani who also presented to the College trust a handsome donation for the new building. Before his departure, Dr. Yamani also proposed to set up an international council for Islamic education with the objective to develop, coordinate, and produce school curricula and textbooks and to establish an accreditation mechanism for the newly emerging schools in non-Muslim countries. This proposal was endorsed in principle by the Conference while its detailed objectives, structures, and organization would be worked out in due course.

The series of conceptual discourses on the perspectives in Islamic philosophy of education and Islamization of knowledge was inaugurated in the plenary sessions by Professor Syed Ali Ashraf, who reviewed all the achievements made in Islamic education after the First World Conference of 1977. Professor Mahmoud Rashdan, dean of Zarqa University (Jordan), delivered a paper titled "Essentials of Islamic Education." Professor Anis Ahmad's paper "Values in Islamic Education" was read by Mohammed Akram Khan-Cheema, a distinguished educationist who is currently an educational consultant in the United Kingdom; he also spoke on "Cross-curricular Themes and Dimensions—the Best Curriculum for Muslim Schools." Dr. Omar Hasan Kasule, director of the Education Projects Bureau at IIIT and pro-

fessor of medicine at the International Islamic University of Malaysia, delivered a paper on "Islamization (Reform) of Disciplines of Knowledge: Procedures and Processes." Dr. Jamil Osman, dean of admissions and registration, described detailed structures, systems, and achievements of the International Islamic University at Kuala Lumpur. Dr. Rosnani Hashim, head of the Department of Education at that university, presented a review of her department and its programs. I presented the paper "Initial and In-service Education and Training of Muslim Teachers." Professor Mohammed Waheed Fakhri, chairman of the Department of Education, Chicago State University, presented his paper "Professional Development of Muslim Teachers." Professor Sha'ban Muftah Ismail presented his paper "Teacher Training Programs: A Model for Introducing a Successful Teacher." Dr. Abidullah Ghazi, director of Iqra International Educational Foundation, explained the need to produce Islamic educational materials and the problems posed in this task. Dr. Tasneema Ghazi described the curriculum development process. Dr. M. Mayanja of the Islamic University of Uganda presented an historical account of that University's development and progress in promoting Islamic education in the East Africa region, while Hussain Rasool of the Islamic Institute of Education and Training of Mauritius gave a detailed account of the plans and prospects of his Institute. Abdul Karim Hasan Khery, administrator, Makeni Islamic Society of Zambia, described the background of the Muslim Teacher Training College which has been established in Lusaka to produce teachers of Islamic studies. Dr. Zakiyya Muhammad, founding director of the Universal Institute for Islamic Education in California, highlighted the work undertaken by that institute in promoting the cause of Islamic education in the United States.

The daily conference update was meticulously prepared, published, and punctually circulated by Ebrahim Hewitt, development officer of the Association of Muslim Schools in the United Kingdom and editor of *Al-Madaris*. However, most of the credit for the success of this Conference must go to the splendid planning and expert arrangements made before and at the Conference by Ismail Kathrada, a retired inspector of schools, Durban; Edris Khameesa, principal of Lockhart Islamia College, Durban; and their team of colleagues from various Muslim schools. They showed real professionalism in organizing the entire program.

This Conference was also a trendsetter in another way. Instead of spending hundreds and thousands of dollars to hold it in a five-star hotel, the Conference was held in the Islamia College itself where, apart from saving Muslim money, the teaching and administrative staff were thoroughly involved in preconference planning and conference activities. In the same spirit, the guests of the Conference were put up in the homes of members of the Muslim community in the vicinity of the College, which

provided the community the opportunity to interact and make friends with overseas participants and become aware of the ideas of the Conference. Thus, the Cape Muslims drew great inspiration from this exercise. Overseas scholars were also assigned to various mosques in the town to give the *khutbah* on Friday on various Islamic educational issues; some also visited townships to greet the previously deprived and segregated Muslim and non-Muslim South Africans. All in all, this Conference was a uniquely organized Muslim affair, boosting the morale of the hitherto isolated Muslims of the region. Muslim educators now look to their production and publication of the Islamized lesson plans, which will provide guidance to teachers in public schools in rendering their lessons in various subjects from the Islamic point of view. In this way, the Conference will prove itself to be another turning point in the history of Islamic education.