

## *New Horizons in Muslim Education*

*S. A. Ashraf*

## *The Concept of an Islamic University*

*H. H. Bilgrami and S. A. Ashraf*

## *Islamic Sociology: An Introduction*

*I. Ba-Yunus and F. Ahmad*

Published in 1985 by the Islamic Academy, Cambridge, and Hodder and Stoughton

The three small—average 100 pages—introductory books under review form a piece and are the first volley from the Islamic Academy at Cambridge. The Academy's Islamic Monograph Series is attractively produced and easy to read. The guiding genius of the Academy is Professor S. A. Ashraf. He was also one of the key figures, as organizing secretary, of the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Makkah in 1977. That Conference greatly accelerated the present trend in Islamic scholarship. Today we hear of Islamic Economics, Islamic Sociology and so on as one result (see my *Towards Islamic Anthropology: definition, dogma and directions* published by the International Institute of Islamic Thought and *Defining Islamic Anthropology* in the Royal Anthropological Institute News, London.)

The two books on education are linked by the authorship and ideas of Professor Ashraf. In the one on education he clearly plans out an Islamic syllabi, training courses (for both students and teachers) and conferences.

Islamic scholarship rests on the following assumptions: "Firstly, the Islamic concept of Man has the width and range no other concept of Man has. As Man can become Khalifatullah by cultivating or realizing within himself the attributes of God [strictly at the human level] and as these attributes have

a limitless dimension, Man's moral, spiritual and intellectual progress is potentially limitless. Secondly, as knowledge is the source of this progress and development, Islam does not put any bar to the acquisition of knowledge. Thirdly, the range of this acquisition must be all by acquiring intellectual expertise because in isolation a person cannot maintain a balanced growth. Fourthly, the spiritual, moral, intellectual, imaginative, emotional and physical aspects of man's personality are kept in view in establishing the interrelationship among the disciplines. Fifthly, the development of personality is seen in the context of Man's relationship with God, Man and Nature. Therefore the organization of disciplines and arrangement of subjects are planned with reference to Man as an individual, Man as a social being and Man as a being who has to live in harmony with Nature." (Ashraf, page 5).

The Islamic University is an equally interesting 'model' (a term used by the distinguished Saudi scholar Abdullah Naseef in his Foreword). Prerequisite III of the University speaks of a staff with *Dedication, devotion, discipline, breadth of vision and critical acumen*. Two points: This is the *ideal teacher*—whether Hindu or Christian—and not exclusive to Islam. Second, where *do we find this teacher?* Prerequisite V also suggests another nebulous ideal. The administration must be given a "*completely free hand*" to run its affairs. In the Muslim world this is an unrealistic assumption. But a start has been made. Pakistan has taken the lead. The first ever Islamic University was started in 1963 in Bahawalpur teaching Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh and also modern subjects, Sociology, English and Economics. A vigorous new Islamic University functions in Islamabad. But all this is till only strategy. Professor Ashraf needs to sell the ideas to the Ministers of Education in Muslim countries. Also, the whole is too much of an outline—a paragraph or two cover education in such countries as Turkey and Egypt.

*Islamic Sociology* is the most provocatively ambitious of the trio. It suggests ideas and engages in debate. It indicates the need for an Islamic sociology: "First, we suggest that Islamic sociology has to be *theoretical*, i.e. able to discover principles of human behaviour in terms of the Quranic discourse on the nature of human nature, the nature of human organization, and the nature of human history. Secondly, we suggest that Islamic sociology has to be critical i.e., develop comparative techniques that would help sociologists discover the deviance of human society from the Islamic ideal. Thirdly, and more importantly, we suggest that Islamic sociology has to be strategic i.e., able to suggest and make plans so that the deviance of society from Islamic injunctions could be minimized." (pages xiii-xiv)

The authors are at times ambiguous. They open with a reference to Ibn Khaldun, the "father" of sociology, go on to attack him for his "value-free sociology," and then later appear to repent. The questions then are: if Muslims have not produced a single Islamic sociologist in 1400 years what has chang-

ed for them to do so now? On what intellectual legacy are they to build? Inevitably western scholarship is dismissed and in a few quick strokes.

The book rightly highlights the outstanding contributions of social scientists like Ali Shariati and the lesser known Basharat Ali. But it wrongly makes such generalizations: "In fact sufism seems to be absent from the Muslim village as much as blind materialism both of which seem to thrive among urban Muslims who are the first to be affected by any changes in the ideological practice of Islam." (page 69)

It also exhibits a tendency to slip into meaningless sentences like "In the preceding pages, we suggested that Islamic theory has to follow a median course i.e., in order to encompass the extremes of human processes, it must avoid taking extreme positions." (page 45)

In concluding the authors suggest a revolutionary role for social scientists—as modern day Faqih. This is an important point and one earlier emphasized by Professor Ismail al Faruqi. Their knowledge of society *as it is*, not only *as it ought to be*, could be a major factor in determining how Muslims see themselves. But they must learn to be clinically accurate; they must not fall into the trap of chauvinism or emotionalism.

There are certain structural faults in the edifice of contemporary Muslim scholarship which must be remedied by its architects. Islamic scholars must watch out for: too many generalizations of the "Western scholarship is bad, Islamic is good" variety; too little critical, clear thinking—Pakistan leading the Islamic world in the Islamization of knowledge programme with the following figures: 12 percent of its population are educated to primary level, 2 percent to secondary and .02 to University level; charges of sexual chauvinism—no women scholars have contributed to these volumes; the danger of academic ethnocentricity (of the four *Books for the General reader* suggested in Ashraf three are by Ashraf himself appendix B); blurred thinking: Ibn Khaldun is singled out for criticism for falling short of Islamic scholarship by BaYunus and Farid Ahmad and as the ideal Islamic scholar by Hossein Nasr in his Foreword to Ashraf's book; creating one-man intellectual show like most of the contemporary Islamic Institutes/Academies. (I discuss these problems further in *Discovering Islam: making sense of Muslim history and society*, Cambridge University Press - forthcoming book).

On the other hand indefatigable intellectual warriors—like Professor Ashraf—and Ismail al Faruqi and Khurshid Ahmad—have taken the first critical steps toward pointing the direction to Islamic knowledge, heeding Nasr in his Foreword: "The central task is an intellectual *jihad*." At one important theoretical point they meet: knowledge rests within the frame provided by the Quran and Sunnah. *Ilm*, *knowledge*, is a key concept in the Quran and the second most used word after Allah. For dedicating their lives in the Islamic

cause often in the face of indifferent Muslim rulers and an apathetic society these scholars deserve applause.

**Akbar S. Ahmed**