Chapter - III

Islam and Education
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This chapter deals with the importance of education for men and women in the Holy Qur'an and in the sayings of the Prophet, for developing a good personal character and knowledge for the need of mankind. It also deals with the Progress of education under the Caliphs, Al-Ghazzali's views on education and the Changing trends of Islam in Education.

Islam is primarily a religion and religion as such is primarily concerned with spiritual matters, but its teachings give standards of value and judgements that apply to all spheres and activities of human life.

Islam attaches immense importance to the acquisition and extension of "ILM" or "Knowledge", for example, the 'Surah-i-Iqra', the first revealed verse of the Qur'an opens with an injunction addressed to the Prophet to "Read" in the name of the Lord who createth, created man from a clot, Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous who teacheth by the Pen, Teacheth man that which he knew not. These Qur'anic verses give importance to Education, treat men and women equally and exhort that a Muslim, whether a boy or girl should be educated.

The place assigned to education in Islam can be best appreciated in the light of the importance attached to ink, pen and paper, the three indispensable instruments of acquiring and extending "knowledge" (including science, self knowledge and spiritual understanding). The same surah also gave importance to the art of writing and its indispensability as a means to education. Learning and scholarship have always been the most prized virtues in Islamic society; so "impacting education" has been considered a meritorious deed. Islam further says, education is a powerful instrument for bringing about social change and putting an end to ignorance and superstitions. It can also transform the world into an abode of peace, free from sin and misery. Islam has set a high ideal of "ilm" or "knowledge" with all its scholastic accompaniments involved in
the study of the Qur'an, Ahadis and other sciences which is the only way to seek truth. It principally aims at the right way of thinking and living, proper understanding of what constitutes the human soul. It also aims at moulding a healthy mind free from worldly desires.

Teachings of Islam clearly envisages a rapid and peaceful transformation of human society for elevating the weak and to equalise all. Islam presents a comprehensive view of personal and collective development through the process of life long learning. It raises its voice against any prejudices of ignorance with an emphasis on acquisition of knowledge. Islam clearly states that a society cannot be developed unless its human resources are properly utilized through cultivation of knowledge and their manifestation in life activities of the people. It advocates human resource developments through lifelong learning. Islam suggests man to ‘grow’ and to ‘develop’ through education. Islam itself has never been hostile to the spread of knowledge into wide circles.

Islam is basically against all kinds of exploitative, specializations of hereditary character. It not only permits its followers for free and unrestricted access to knowledge both sacred and secular, but also makes its acquisition obligatory for all (not only for the ignorant but also for those who are in its quest). By opening the gateway of knowledge for common man, Islam obviously intended the liberation and equalization of individuals irrespective of sex and other backgrounds. Islam emphasis on universalisation of education and on its quest and acquisition as early as 1400 years ago sounds astonishingly socialistic and modern.

Learning has been defined as the highest attainment of humanity, a way leading to right conduct and cultivation of virtue. But learning without putting the knowledge gained into practice, would be meaningless. Teaching and imparting knowledge is considered to be the noblest occupations. The teacher is held in high esteem in the Islamic society eventhough he may not be wealthy.
The foundation of Muslim education stands mainly on two pillars - Qur'an and Sunnah.

The Qur'an is the most important of all the primary sources of Islamic Law and ultimate guide to its believers. There are many verses in the Holy Qur'an which emphasize the importance of developing a good personal character through education and the need for right education in order to make the people spiritually and morally good and economically well off.

A thorough study of Qur'an denotes that to free the mind from illusions, the fetters of stagnation and shackles of superstitions, Allah has told both men and women to seek knowledge and build a great intellectual civilization and culture.

The Qur'an in about 750 verses persuades all its followers (men and women) to read, to think deeply about and to ponder over the signs of God - universe, the laws of nature, sun, moon, cycle of day and night, origin of life, creation of man and other things. (See also Appendix - I). There is not even a single verse which says, means, or even remotely suggests that only men are capable to think or to read.

The Qur'anic concept on education has been further elaborated in many sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who stressed the on-going education of men and women. Though, he had no formal education, but he was a pioneer of Islamic education. Both as a preacher of new religion, Islam and as the head of a State, he proved to be an effective leader, teacher and an enthusiastic promoter of learning. He sat in the mosque at Medina surrounded by his followers and instructed them by repeating whatever he had to say three times, until they memorized it, such instructions were also imparted to women.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “The search for knowledge is a duty for every Muslim (male or female)”, “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave” and “Knowledge” for a Muslim is not divided into sacred and secular. The implication of
these sayings of the Prophet in modern times, is that every Muslim should pursue his or her education as far as it is possible, bearing in mind the words of Allah in the Qur’an. In this connection the Holy Qur’an says: “The erudite among His bondsmen fear Allah alone.”

As a result of this Qur’anic verse women were equally regarded for their scholarly status. The list has on top no less than Prophet’s own wives Hazrat Ayesha, Hazrat Hafsa and his daughter Hazrat Fatima.

**Progress of Education under the Caliphs:**

All through the times of Khilafat-i-Rashida, the days of the first four Caliphs, after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) education continued to make rapid progress. Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph was said to have asked the Muslims to acquire scientific knowledge even if it was imparted by a heretic and a non-believer. The readers of the Qur’an were mainly responsible for the spread of Qur’anic teachings and the Prophet’s traditions among the Arabs and the non-Arab Muslims. For the first time, the Muslims started formalizing their educational system. Elementary education seems to have been established in the early Umayyad period and developed in the newly conquered countries such as Iraq, Syria and Persia. People in search of knowledge went to the mosques, which, besides, being a place of worship, also served as an educational centre.

Under the Abbasids, education made tremendous progress because Muslims came under the influence of Greek Literature and Philosophy. It was during this period that the Arabs became acquainted with Indian sciences, particularly medicine, mathematics and astronomy. The contact of the Arabs with the outside world revolutionised their outlook on different spheres of life. This period witnessed the intensification of efforts towards formalisation of the educational system, initiated during the Umayyad times. Besides, providing elementary education to the general masses, efforts were also made for development of Higher education. Children of the upper class and the nobility did
not attend the mosque and maktab catered to the educational needs of the Muslim masses. The elite had private tutors who imparted education to them.²⁴

There are many versions at the sayings of the Prophet emphasizing the importance of imparting knowledge as a religious duty. The followers of Islam have always held the same attitude of their Prophet towards learning and has made contribution to the progress of science for the benefit of mankind²⁵.

Al-Ghazzali’s Views on Education:

Al-Ghazzali the great mystic of 11th century A.D. is the best interpreter of Muslim ideas on education. He said, closeness to God can be attained only through knowledge. In fact, the religious aim of Islam i.e. education is the service of God, is the highest articulation of learning. The object of teaching and studying is the preparation of all mortals for another world and finally that it is considered wicked and sinful for one to venture on the quest for knowledge without the sincerity and purity of Niyyat. Niyyat is a vital factor in the pursuit of knowledge.²⁶

The religious component of education in Islam should not lead one to conclude that such knowledge as is necessary for the discharge of everyday civic duties, is not considered necessary. Islam has not only permitted the study of science useful on civic and social purposes but has, at times, even made it obligatory. Its study has never been interdicted on religious grounds. In fact, Islam does not permit the use of religious means to attain secular ends. For non-religious ends there are non-religious sciences and Ulamas have declared many of them as Farz-i-Kifaya. Imam Ghazzali writes that Farz-i-Kifaya are those sciences which help in conducting the affairs of the world. These cannot be ignored. For instance, it is essential to study the medicine for preservation of health, arithmetic for contracts and division of inherited property and so on. Similarly, many vocations such as agriculture, horticulture, weaving, tailoring, hair-dressing are also essential for society. There will be much hardship, if no one pursues any of these professions in a city. Therefore, it is undesirable to give up these vocations and training
for them is obligatory as “Farz-i-kifaya”. The non-religious Ulam are definitely important for the successful conduct of worldly affairs\(^{27}\). Thus, Islam recognizes knowledge for the need of mankind.

**Changing Trends of Islam in Education**

In its attitude towards science Islam recognizes the need for exploring the vast field of pragma that lies beyond a limited and a well defined area of dogma. This attitude presupposes a vast arena of scientific enquiry beyond the range of a limited area of settled body of knowledge. The originality of Islam lies in its perpetual struggle for exploration and its ceaseless quest for learning\(^{28}\).

Every educational system worth the name must have a value system. The Islamic educational system must also clarify its value system. Every dynamic system has two essential features.

1. It has some unalterable, basic features which distinguish it from other systems; if these basic features disappear the system also disappears.

2. It has a mechanism for changing the non-basic features; if such mechanism for change does not exist, the system cannot adapt itself to changes in time and space and tends to stagnate and disappear.\(^{29}\)

The basic features of the Islamic constitution as embodied in the Qur’an and Sunnah are the “nusus-e-qatai” such as the belief in Allah the faith in the Prophet and the basic attitude that all human activity is in the way of Allah. Those who do not believe in these are not Muslims. Islamic education has to inculcate these beliefs and attitudes in Muslim Youth both male and female. Side by side with the inculcation and strengthening of these basic values, Islamic education must build into the mind of Muslim youth a resilience, an adaptability and a mechanism for adjustment in worldly matters other than the fundamental beliefs. The Arabs were the first people to demonstrate the resilience and adaptability during the hey day of Islamic intellectual efflorescence, for instance, they acquired the Greek learning subjected to investigation,
experimentation and expansion in such diverse fields as algebra, geometry, astronomy, navigation, chemistry and medicine and evolved the scientific principles of empiricism. Dr. A.M. Khusro, Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University, India, stresses the need to clarify the value system that should inform the reformed Islamic education system. Along with the inculcation and strengthening of basic values, the education system should also aim at training Muslim youth whether male or female in the correct method of adjusting himself/herself to a changing environment.

The move towards the adoption of western ideas began in the nineteenth century in many Muslim countries due to the external circumstance of foreign western domination. As a result of this, in nearly all Muslim countries there are two systems of education - the traditional and modern, whereas in the early days of Islam there was only one system, which taught purely theological subjects and mundane subjects like engineering and medicine, at present the traditional system has the reading of the Qur'an, Fiqh, Tafsir, Hadith and Arabic language and literature as core subjects. In some places Classical logic or Mantiq (which ignores all developments in the west) Mathematics and Islamic history are also taught. Islamic philosophy was included in a diluted form in one or two places comparative religion, comparative study of Islamic and Western legal systems and natural sciences which had been developed and adopted in the Western Countries were not given any importance in the Islamic countries, because religious education was their primary objective in their system of education.

Modern education means secular education according to which religious subjects are treated in the same way as non-religious subjects such as mathematics and geography. Nothing is taken for granted. The approach to knowledge is to some extent sceptical. The intention is to help the growth of a balanced personality whose intellect, emotions and physical self are balanced one against the other or in other words, in harmony. There is an attempt to preserve a moral code but both teachers and the taught are finding it very difficult to subscribe to a common ethical norm. This modern educational
system receives full government support because the governments realize that through this system they can produce trained people skilled enough to handle the problems of modern life or an industrialized society.

Thus, the educated Muslims began to live intellectually in two worlds. One was dominated by western philosophy, science, jurisprudence and rationalism. The other was his religious, spiritual sphere. In varying degrees, depending on personal attitudes and decisions, he continued to adhere to the traditional forms, beliefs, rites and ceremonies prescribed by his faith. The faith of most educated Muslims is, indeed, as strong as ever, at some point reason is silenced and faith alone is allowed to speak.

Islam has a definite perspective of knowledge. It is believed that the Islamic knowledge is different from that of western knowledge. The Islamic knowledge basically emphasizes harmony, equilibrium and balance. It helps to create science and technology by utilizing the natural resources through maximum use of human skills and with the minimum disturbance of natural environment. Thus, Islamic knowledge is participatory in nature and revolutionary in approach. What distinguishes the Islamic system of education from the modern western system is the importance it attaches to faith and piety as one of its fundamental aims. Modern education has encouraged a scientific attitude to life and hence the emergence of secularism and individualism.

At first the traditionally learned class, the Ulama, resisted modern education or secular education system and tried to save Muslim society by preserving the traditional system of education. But as they did not at the same time try to meet the challenge to religion coming from secular concepts, they could only preserve the spiritual concept in a section of the community. Hence, a cultural duality appeared everywhere in the Muslim world, a duality in society that resulted from the dual education systems, the traditional Islamic education system creating the traditional Islamic group, and the modern secular education system creating the secularists. In many countries a secular education system gradually replaced all other forms of education. In other countries
both systems are still in existence, but the secular system has become more dominant especially in a country like India.38

Unfortunately, neither the traditionalists nor the modernists, neither the political authorities nor the traditionally learned class ever to evolve a common system through which the transmission of values could be integrated with the development of new skills and techniques and faith could be strengthened through the production and distribution of wealth. As a result the two motivations - the maintenance and the strengthening of spiritual values and the material prosperity and industrial advancement of society have pulled the different sections of society apart. The traditional system of education is resisting change but preserving spiritual values and modern education is ignoring, the in roads into values through western text-books and methodology39.

In consequence of westernisation, knowledge of Islamic subjects alone is not enough. The spheres of the East and the West have become so close that the Muslim cannot live by himself / herself in his own spiritual and intellectual world. Indeed, that has never been wholly the case. In the middle ages, the Greek and Hellenistic philosophy had deeply influenced the theological and philosophic development of Islam. Thus, Islam is closer to the West than to the East. Only the increased pace of development in the west and the initially reluctant intellectual participation of Muslims in it, made the distance between them appear to be a discrepancy.40

But, the East is on its way to catch up with the west, atleast in scientific knowledge and technology. The integration into “Islamic Thought” the conciliation and harmonization between the Western and Eastern thought patterns will come in due time, and all indications predict, that this is not too far off. There is also a growing desire in the West, born partly of the political necessities, to increase its understanding of Eastern thought. Thus, East and West are moving towards each other, all appearances to the contrary not withstanding. Once, they have met intellectually and spiritually and understood each other’s motives and thought, their political rapprochement will follow41.
The upholders of Islamic modernism observed that Islam stands for an enlightenment, allows free enquiry encourages rationality and admits cultivation of knowledge by learning what is known and exploring what is unknown.

To sum up, Islam gives the foremost place to Education in the life of the people in order to adjust themselves to a changing environment. It advocates human resource developments through life long learning. Thus Islam recognises the Right to Education of Muslim women.
References


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