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*Challenges in higher education and the role of Muslim cultures and civilisations in developing a new paradigm in education**

Los desafíos en la educación superior y el papel de las culturas y civilizaciones musulmanas en el desarrollo de un nuevo paradigma en Educación

Marodsilton Muborakshoeva**

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MARODSILTON MUBORAKSHOEVA is a lecturer for the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities as well as for the Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP). As the module leader for STEP's core modules (Revelation, Hermeneutics, Pluralism and Practice and Literature of Muslim Societies), her responsibilities include modification and review of modules, delivery of lectures and seminars and assessing student progress. She acts as a mentor and lesson plan tutor for STEP students and in addition to this she is also a research supervisor for STEP students pursuing their MA degree and GPISH students field work projects. She also delivers lectures on Research Design and Methods for GPISH as part of her role at the Institute. Marodsilton completed her Diploma (BA) in Philology at Tajik State University after which she worked as a teacher of Tajik language and literature in the Shughnan district of Tajik Badakshan. Following this, Marodsilton worked for The Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Committee (ITREC) in Tajikistan where some of her projects involved field trips and work with the Ismaili communities of Afghanistan. Part of her research with ITREC also involved work with women teachers in the region and projects related to the collection of oral traditions in Badakhshan. Marodsilton joined the Institute's Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities in 2000 and completed her MSc in Comparative and International Education at the University of Oxford, where her thesis explored the historical background of higher educational institutions among Muslims. She embarked on her DPhil studies at the University of Oxford in its Department of Educational Studies and further developed her Masters research to look at the concepts of universities in Muslim contexts and examine challenges these universities face and opportunities they have. Marodsilton worked on the topic extensively and developed the thesis into a book, which has been published by Routledge and entitled *Islam and Higher Education: Concepts, Challenges and Opportunities*. **Datos de contacto: E-mail: mmuborakshoeva@iis.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper explores the challenges modern Muslim scholars face when acquiring and producing knowledge and when thinking about what they can borrow and revive from the educational approaches of Muslim scholars of the Middle Ages in order to come up with a new paradigm of learning in education. Some of these challenges are the gaps between secular and religious education, marginalisation of various types of learning and the dominance of one mode of learning - especially the dominance of western-based epistemology and ethical principles in education, struggling to choose between competing and often contradictory paradigms, not knowing much about one's own cultural and civilizational legacy and what it could offer to resolve these issues, etc. Some scholars started researching these challenges, yet it is very rare that a combined library research and field work is conducted to examine such issues. In this research, drawing on the analysis of relevant literature and qualitative interviews conducted with prominent scholars, we aim to shed light on some of these challenges and provide solutions to them. The seriousness of these challenges and searching for ways to resolve them compels us to look back and critically examine what educational approaches were used by Muslim scholars and pedagogues in the Middle Ages and what happened to those approaches in the modern times. Critical examination of such legacy is very important so that we avoid the temptation of just regurgitating those achievements in terms of Muslims' world view about education and epistemology in the past and creatively revive those according to the needs of modern times.

Key Words: Islamic legacy, epistemology, knowledge acquisition, modes of learning, ethical principles and values

Resumen

Este documento explora los desafíos a los que se enfrentan los eruditos musulmanes modernos cuando adquieren y producen conocimiento y cuando piensan en qué se puede pedir prestado y qué puede recuperarse de los enfoques educativos de los eruditos musulmanes de la Edad Media para idear un nuevo paradigma de aprendizaje en educación. Algunos de estos desafíos son las brechas entre la educación secular y la religiosa, la marginación de varios tipos de aprendizaje y el dominio de un modo de aprendizaje -especialmente en el Oeste- basado en los principios éticos en la educación, que luchan por elegir entre competidores y, a menudo, contradictorios paradigmas, sin saber mucho sobre la propia cultura y legado de su civilización, y lo que podría ofrecer para resolver estos problemas, etc. Algunos académicos comenzaron a investigar estos desafíos; sin embargo, es muy raro que se realice una investigación combinada de bibliotecas y trabajo de campo para examinar dichos problemas. En esta investigación, aprovechando el análisis de la literatura relevante y las entrevistas cualitativas realizadas con destacados académicos, nuestro objetivo es arrojar luz sobre algunos de estos desafíos y brindarles soluciones. La seriedad de estos desafíos y la búsqueda de formas de resolverlos nos obligan a mirar hacia atrás y examinar críticamente qué enfoques educativos utilizaron los eruditos y pedagogos musulmanes en la Edad Media y qué sucedió con esos enfoques en los tiempos modernos. El examen crítico de este legado es muy importante para evitar la tentación de solo regurgitar esos logros en términos de la visión del mundo de los musulmanes sobre la educación y la epistemología en el pasado, siendo preciso revivir creativamente aquellos de acuerdo con las necesidades de los tiempos modernos.

Palabras clave: Legado islámico; epistemología; adquisición de conocimientos; modos de aprendizaje; principios y valores éticos

1. Introduction

When deliberating about the challenges modern Muslim scholars face in acquiring and producing knowledge and when thinking about what they can borrow and revive from the educational approaches of Muslim scholars of the Middle Age to develop a new paradigm of learning in education, one must critically examine these challenges and the historical past of education among Muslims. Most of these are challenges educational institutions and scholars have been encountering since the introduction of modernity among Muslims. For instance, the gaps between secular and religious education, marginalisation of various types of learning and the dominance of one mode of learning - especially the dominance of western-based epistemology and ethical principles in education, struggling to choose between competing and often contradictory paradigms, not knowing one's own cultural and civilizational legacy and what it could offer to resolve these issues, etc. In this paper, we attempt to combine library research and field work to examine such issues. Drawing on the analysis of relevant literature and qualitative interviews conducted with prominent scholars, we aim to shed light on some of these challenges and provide solutions to them. The critical examination of Muslims' educational legacy allows us to avoid the temptation of just regurgitating those achievements in terms of Muslims' world view about education and epistemology in the past and creatively revive those according to the needs of modern times. It is not sufficient to just be proud of what Muslims achieved in the past any more. It is the right moment for us to think and utilise their methods and ways of thinking and come up with a new re-interpretation of those methods and world-views suitable for our age, or as Henzell Thomas encourages us, to examine "how the values and principles which gave rise to such a civilisation can be renewed, re-interpreted and applied in contemporary world" (cited in Sardar, 2015, p.6).

Some important questions with regard to how in the Middle Ages Muslim scholars with diverse approaches to knowledge acquisition, nevertheless all worked under the guidance of the holy Qur'an and its world-view have been addressed by this author (Muborakshoeva, 2013a; 2013b). However, critical questions still to be pursued are; why we, contemporary Muslim scholars, are unable to work under the same educational framework? Why is it that we, in modern times, often dichotomise our lives and world views when acquiring and producing knowledge? What lesson, as contemporary Muslim thinkers, can we learn from our medieval colleagues and how can we revive and renew some of this educational heritage they had left for us? Why is it that despite the turmoil and upheavals in the Muslim contexts of the middle ages, the educational environment was more accommodating for the emergence of diverse approaches to knowledge acquisition and production tolerant of each other and why in the contemporary times mostly one view of how to acquire and produce knowledge predominates and other modes are either marginalised or deemed to be unscientific?

This paper firstly argues that most of these challenges educational institutions and individuals face are as a result of Muslims' encounters with modernity since the nineteenth century. Contrary to the relatively harmonious relationship between science and religion in the medieval times, contemporary Muslim scholars have been facing numerous challenges since the introduction of modernity in Muslim contexts. Secondly therefore, using the qualitative interviews, the paper discusses the challenges modern Muslim scholars have been facing when it comes to reconciling their belief and academic endeavour. The paper contends that some of these challenges remain unresolvable if

we do not reconceptualise our educational approaches and do not learn from our own Islamic legacy. Thirdly, the paper provides some solutions to these challenges, especially those related to epistemological issues, and proposes some possible ways for how to re-interpret and revive the epistemology used by Muslim thinkers of the past so that we, contemporary Muslim scholars, are able to come up with our own educational paradigm that is inclusive of all aspects of our lives and is not divisive. Existing research as well as qualitative interviews conducted with prominent scholars in the UK and Pakistan on the aspects related to these themes will be utilised.

2. The roots of challenges contemporary Muslim scholars and educational establishments face

The situation with knowledge acquisition and its production in Muslim contexts has been the subject of scrutiny over the last few decades. It is felt that the state of learning and teaching, research and publication, innovation in science and technology, and art and culture is deplorable in the Muslim world and there is a need to urgently remedy the situation. Ever since the 1970s many scholars have concerned themselves with resolving these issues and have initiated many projects and organised conferences to address them. Evaluating the state of education in the Muslim world and searching for alternative models for higher educational institutions, scholars have explored what Islam as a religion and civilisation can offer to resolve some of these dilemmas. They have provided conceptual framework for the so called 'Islamisation of Knowledge' project (see Al-Attas 1980, Al-Faruqi & Nasseef 1981, Ashraf 1985, Ashraf and Bilgrami 1985). Despite numerous merits to their work and thought provoking arguments proposed by the scholars supporting the 'Islamisation of Knowledge' project (Muborakshoeva 2013a), their approach has been criticised for having political agenda and, in some cases, the scholars have been accused of legitimizing the rather questionable policies of the state (Abaza, 2001).

Learning from these earlier experiences, a recent attempt to re-open the debates about the state of education in Muslim contexts has been initiated by scholars at the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT). They feel that there is a lack of understanding about Muslim cultures and civilisations of the past and its utility in modern times. They provide some policy recommendation for the governments and institutions to follow and plan to hold seminars and conferences in the future to work on the recommendations (IIIT, 2013). The conference on the 'Reforming Education in the Muslim World' to be held in March 2016 and organised by IIIT is part of such initiatives.

Recent research publications also confirm the seriousness of the crisis in education, especially in higher education in Muslim contexts. Combining historical and field research, the book *Islam and Higher Education: Concepts, Challenges and Opportunities* highlights that higher education in Muslim contexts, rich in heritage and conceptually diverse, nevertheless faces many challenges in contemporary times (Muborakshoeva, 2013a). Among numerous challenges the most outstanding ones are funding, quality assurance, leadership and management, organization of knowledge, position of women, reconciliation of modernity with tradition, and teaching of Muslim cultures and civilizations, especially religion. Most of these issues and challenges in higher education though are not of recent origin. The educational landscape in Muslim contexts has been facing numerous challenges since the encounters with foreign influences via colonialization or

other interactions with the industrial nations of Europe from the nineteenth century or earlier, depending on when such encounters occurred (*Ibid*). It was the time when the indigenous schools started to be marginalised and the modern institutions for higher education to be established as early as nineteenth century in some Muslim countries. Hence it can be argued that most of these issues were inherent in the nature (or in the conceptualisation) of the institutions of higher education since their inceptions.

Marginalisation of indigenous educational establishments and scholars produced by such institutions had in most cases occurred due to an assumption that the enhancement of societies in Europe was as a direct result of its advanced higher educational institutions. There was little realisation that these advancements were largely linked with the Europeans colonising other nations and exploiting their wealth to develop industries and capitalist structures back home (*Ibid*). In fact, the educational institutions such as universities in Europe were not at the forefront of industrial, scientific and technological revolutions, or the philosophical ‘Enlightenment’ movement (Scott, 1984). As a result, these ‘revolutions’ made it possible for governments and individuals to invest in education, especially universities, and develop them as centres for quality teaching and research. Gradually therefore universities in the developed world have become the forerunners of knowledge production without which it is almost impossible for modern societies to function. Societies in such contexts are now heavily dependent on universities. This however, does not exempt these universities from facing challenges – most of them do face challenges similar to those that universities in Muslim contexts experience.

This is because most of the issues raised by Muslim scholars in terms of epistemology, approaches to education and knowledge acquisition and its production are global issues. As Sardar (2015, p.10) rightly observes, “epistemologically, the Enlightenment idea of modernity... has failed”, because “its associated concepts of progress, efficiency, and development, transformed vast swathes of our planet into disaster zones- of which climate change is the most evident example.” Similarly, he thinks, postmodernism “has generated an acute crisis in identity that is a major source of so much conflict in today’s world” and its encouragement for globalisation or multiculturalism have reinvigorated the dominance of Western cultural and moral values on the rest of the world. I would add that the educational establishments, especially the universities of the Western countries are places to perpetuate those values and disseminate them successfully throughout the world. That is why the universities in the West too are in crisis as a result of their own students (whether they are from western or non-western cultures) questioning these global inequalities. To address such challenges at all levels of education, some intellectual and scholarly movements have started to question the current dominant educational paradigms (Forbes, 2003). The most formidable criticism of such paradigms comes from the proponents of holistic education who would like to move away from dogmatic scientific paradigms and replace it with a paradigm that aims to develop the whole person (Miller, 2005) and “integrates science and spirituality in an expanded framework of human experience” (Nava, 2001, p.5). Muslim scholars too are examining the challenges education faces and searching for new responses and educational world-views. They particularly call for an integrated approach to knowledge which takes an account of all aspects of human life and does not leave any aspect (e.g. religion, identity, culture, etc) aside.

In order to come up with an integrated approach to knowledge and have an holistic view of education in Muslim contexts, some of these challenges Muslim scholars and institutions have been facing since the enhancement of modern development need to be

examined at a deeper level. Relying on the analysis of qualitative interviews here we focus on discussing challenges related to the dominance of one mode of learning, namely, the outdated western-based approaches to learning and the search for a new paradigm in education, methodological challenges in research, and how to understand and practice academic freedom.

3. The dominance of one mode of learning & the search for a new paradigm in education

One particular challenge learners, teachers and scholars, and the institutions for teaching and learning generally face in Muslim contexts, is the dominance of one mode of teaching and learning, namely reading and writing. ‘An educated person’, in accordance to modern understanding, is the one who can read and write as a result of going through formal schooling from primary to higher education level. Knowledge acquired without having reading and writing skills is mainly considered worthless and not much appreciated by the society, and indeed, the person lacking those skills would not find employment or have any respectable position in the society. A scholar related to me how he found ‘the idea of literacy which is rooted in reading and writing in formal modern schools from primary to university levels’ disturbing. He further elaborated:

"If you look at Muslims' history, reading and writing were not the only means to transmit knowledge, rather it was the word, the spoken word, which was a much more popular method than formal reading and writing... the Qur'an did not come in a textual but rather an oral form and was transmitted orally throughout the centuries by people memorising it and transmitting it even though it was already available in written form".

Historically, methods of teaching and learning in Muslim contexts have been diverse and would have been utilised both in formal and informal educational settings. The fact that mostly one mode of teaching and learning prevails in Muslim contexts today contradicts the very nature and traditions of knowledge acquisition and transmission among Muslims. The holistic approach to education and diverse pedagogies allowed knowledge to be acquired and transmitted via any method such as reading and writing, memorisation, recitation of the Qur'an and poetry, story-telling and literature, calligraphy, or painting and other forms of art. Even today there are personalities, who may not have reading and writing skills, yet they could be well aware of and knowledgeable about a vast body of literature on Islamic religious doctrines or ethics and moral values as propagated by Prophet Muhammad, the caliphs and the Imams (for the Shi'a). Such learning was accessible to them due to a sheer participation in religious gatherings and ceremonies and listening to intellectual discourses there as well as growing up in a vibrant and creative culture (Muborakshoeva, 2013a; 2013b).

Most scholars I spoke to believed that the reason for Muslims not being able to value and promote their own diverse methods of teaching and learning and being stuck with a rather narrow approach to education in formal institutions is linked with broader issues and circumstances they are in. This is connected with the indigenous traditions of knowledge acquisition and transmission being marginalised since the colonial time, as discussed earlier, as well as consequent challenges education in Muslim contexts is

facing in terms of epistemology and philosophy of education. According to some interviewees contemporary Muslim scholars and intellectuals never could fully accept the positivist epistemology, but at the same time they are unable to come up with their own educational philosophy or paradigm. A retired professor from Karachi University told me how, for instance, logical positivism depreciated the values, especially religious and moral values, yet in the Eastern context these values are still given huge importance:

"...the dilemma is this that the entire [modern] legacy is bound to science and its technological culture, its industry and businesses, there is a plain rejection of fantasy and imagination, poetry and mysticism and all that...logical positivism, for instance, says that only verifiable facts are addressed, values, religion, ethics and that is all transcendental is nonsense. But all these things matter for life, there must be some imagination and some dreaming. The sheer rejection of these will make a person egoist, focused on his self-interest, which means the more you produce and consume the more you can get. This is what has separated West from East, where the latter is still going by its own religion, because if religion goes ethics goes, aesthetics goes in the form of mysticism. Mysticism is very important and has been emphasised in the West as well, after Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, all these postmodernists realised that though God is dead the world is not".

Consequently, Muslim scholars find it hard to accept such educational approaches, which neglect the important aspects of cultural and moral values in society. At the same time they are rarely able to address such challenges posed to their values or approaches to knowledge acquisition and transmission. In fact, one can conclude that inadvertently scholars in Muslim contexts are clinging to a rather outdated Western epistemology, which has been challenged in the West itself as scholars there search for other alternative and creative educational theories and approaches. I explored with some interviewees the reason as to why in Muslim contexts most scholars are incapable of responding to such challenges when in the West scholars using phenomenology and hermeneutics have challenged logical positivism and other reductionist approaches in education. The responses were that scholars teaching at secular as well as religious institutions have a rather confused understanding of epistemology and educational approaches. They lack criticality and creativity to even question the status quo and come up with their own newly formulated educational paradigm rooted in their own heritage and addressing the needs of the changing world. A scholar from Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) highlighted:

"...most Muslim scholars and intellectuals, I would argue, do not know which paradigm they belong to, so they are actually working inadvertently with the liberal-secular-humanistic point of view... The reason they do not consider a communist point of view is that it does not allow the possibility of God, the liberal-secular-humanist point of view is also not premised upon God, but it tolerates God as long as God is kept in his place and separate from the field of inquiry... As far as the response to the scientific paradigm is concerned, there is a small school in Pakistan, which is a traditional school ... This school of thought provides some formidable critique of modernity... these are a group of scholars who have spent at least 15-20 years in the West and have first-hand knowledge and experience of modernity".

This then leads to scholars often dichotomising their lives and educational activities when it comes to following their religion and getting secular education. A professor of Islamic studies thought that nowadays indigenous institutions such as madrasahs train you for the world to come as opposed to their former function where they prepared professionals fully aware of religious and cultural heritage too. The secular institutions prepare a person “for this world, but there is another world out there” for which they are illiterate. This dichotomy between the two educational systems, he added, “introduced tensions in Muslim societies from which they have not yet recovered and unless they recover from that there will continue to be a lot of tensions and unhappiness”. A female professor who has taught for 25 years at the University of the Punjab told me:

“...unfortunately that is what I feel [that] people do dichotomise their lives, it is like religion is given and put on a pedestal but it doesn’t permeate what is called sort of western secular knowledge, and the Muslims are divided, on the one hand they don’t question the religion, on the other hand if they do indulge let’s say in secular studies or westernised that is, they feel that it will not infiltrate into their religion so they keep them side by side, separate, and somehow I feel that this polarisation means that you don’t let what I call critical and creative thinking to come to the forth. So for me the concrete first step is to get the teachers to teach as if they are two sides to a picture, and then a student will realise that there are more than one ways of looking at things, only then you do begin to analyse and then critique, you look at the pros and the cons, if you only look at the pros all the time and the teachers made the decision and decided which is the most positive thing that must be transmitted, then the students have nothing to do, and they just accept passively and therefore what the teachers do they just pour down knowledge on an empty vessel...”

Most interviewees thought that the ulama are not in a better position either –they generally take a defensive stance and in some contexts have attempted to influence the organisation of knowledge at higher educational institutions:

“...the inability of religious parties to make a philosophical response to the theory of evolution forces them to [retreat] to the intellectual ghettos, to intellectual relativism... so in Pakistan you will find several examples, where the presence of religious parties is strong, where they have gone and shut down biology and physics departments because they are teaching ‘haram’ things. I am myself aware of the shortcomings of the theory of evolution... But it is not a reason to stop the theory of evolution [being] taught, you should teach it as a theory among several theories”.

As a result many departments for Islamic studies were created in many Muslim countries. It perhaps can be argued that marginalisation of the indigenous institutions and the introduction of the department of Islamic studies with little critical input into what needs to be taught in those departments and what epistemologies and methodologies were to follow, created more challenges than resolving the existing ones. An interviewee, therefore, highlighted that although the indigenous institutions of learning have been marginalised it does not mean that the ulama are completely powerless or do not have any influence on the affairs of the state and society in some Muslim contexts. He explained:

"The ulama became a body within the society who have their strength, interest, and have opposed to any innovation... May be they were marginalized because people preferred modern education, but their influence is there, because there is no alternative, no one could be put in place, it was their views, their teachings, their methods, their limitations which were imposed and still are imposed... Every state now in the Muslim world has this problem, it is how to place these elites. Now even in Saudi Arabia these kinds of elites have a great power in society who act like religious police in the country".

However, blaming the scholars only, whether in religious or secular institutions, for the lack of criticality and innovative approaches in education is perhaps not entirely fair. This is because they operate in societies, which very often struggle with national economies, politics, cultures, and identities since the Second World War when they obtained their independence. Moreover, most of these countries experience strong neo-colonial influences and as such they cling to a kind of defensive approach they have developed ever since the colonial age. Therefore, the societies as a whole are not entirely free and open to critical thinking and innovation and this ultimately affects all social institutions negatively. Some interviewees discussed the strong influence of the state on what is to be taught at universities across the Arab world. For example, in Morocco, a scholar told me, the state had a say and control over the organisation of knowledge and its production:

"For example, in Morocco [in the 70s], the regime did not like training people in the humanities, because at some point they thought the people become leftists, or communists and will be critical about the Kingdom, and the King, the regime, and the society. And they did not want that, so they did everything, for example, and made an historical decision... They decided in one day to close all philosophy departments and replaced them by Islamic studies [departments]... I was [back then] beginning my career there, so, I had to choose either to teach something that I was not trained in, I knew nothing about Islamic studies, or to find another job. The state wanted engineers and so on and they did not want critical minds, at that moment the idea was to train people to do the everyday jobs that were needed and nothing else, to be obedient to the society and not think..."

Added to this is the overall lack of Muslim scholars' awareness and critical understanding of Muslim cultures and civilisations and the educational legacy of the past Muslim scholars. An interviewee commented that a critical examination of Muslim cultures, especially its educational heritage, has not happened yet. Some critical and open research on philosophy of education and approaches to knowledge and on Muslim cultures and civilisations has been conducted at the universities in Europe and the USA rather than at the educational establishments in the Muslim world. This demonstrates how societies, scholars, and the institutions in general have very little to contribute, when it comes to the enhancement of knowledge in science and technology or in culture and religious studies.

Nevertheless, there is some awareness among Muslim scholars about deficiencies and shortcomings of the current dominant epistemology and the need for evaluating and revising it critically. A lecturer from LUMS thought that approaches to knowledge in the Eastern context, whether it be Islamic or other traditions, essentially have a non-materialist spiritual outlook on life. This then becomes a philosophical premise from which the sciences flow. If the purely materialistic approach and understanding of sciences

continue, then there is very little hope for the reconciliation of tradition with modernity and scholars developing new epistemology. He elaborated:

"...[if this state of affairs continues] then modernity and tradition cannot be reconciled, they go to completely separate directions, because the emphasis is on corporality and materiality in modern systems- it is the system of verification, system of objectivity and so forth are empirical and materialistic, the end of the science is somehow not spiritual, I mean if you look at all paradigms in the American or the European universities there is a conscious moving away from God, because you cannot see and touch God. The allegation of science is that verification can only be done by five senses and so it discounts or dismisses other ways of knowing and this is the biggest debate, which is on the nature of human being, human being as animal with nothing in it, human being as partly animal. But what makes us human is the possibility of soul, spirit, elements of spirituality and so forth. So as long as the modern science would not take the spiritual element [into account] its role would be a certain type of science [only], whereas the traditional sciences ... are premised upon the notion of ultimate reality which is non corporeal and so therefore all the things that are seen in this world are not really permanent reality but they are ephemeral they come and go, so there is a distinct world view that informs us how the society can be looked at..."

The other deficiency with the modern higher education scholars identified was how the teaching of philosophy has been marginalised globally as a result of which the disciplines are compartmentalised and disconnected from their shared philosophical foundations. A scholar commented that a critical school he belongs to raises these questions and tries to find solutions to them:

"For all social sciences, humanities, and even hard sciences that is physics, chemistry and biology, the assumptions are all philosophic in nature so you actually cannot study either the hard sciences or the social sciences in isolation from their philosophical assumption and so immediately there is a precedent that has to be given to philosophy and metaphysics. As long as you don't live with the root of the thought you cannot really know what are the implications of it in the society or in the intellectual life of the scholars at large..."

Research findings also demonstrate that the perceived dichotomy between traditional and modern education might not be as sharp as it is often assumed. There are interchanges and influences of the former on the latter as it was discussed earlier. There are examples of some societies (e.g. Turkey in the 1880s,) and individuals that successfully bridged the traditional and secular education. For example, intellectuals such as Fazlur Rahman, Said Hussain Nasr, and many others went through traditional education as well as secular training (Muborakshoeva 2013a) or Hasan Turabi was taught the religious sciences by his father at home and completed his formal education up to the PhD level in Sudan (El-Affendi, 1990).

4. Methodological challenges

Linked with the epistemological challenges discussed earlier, there are methodological issues that Muslim scholars face and cannot get out of that dead end. A scholar from LUMS highlighted:

"We focus on problems that the world has not given much attention to, but in order to research these we need people who are knowledgeable about methodologies that the West has developed for decades. That also puts a bit of constraint..., because in the Muslim and developing world we first need to understand that methodology and then apply it to this context... But in terms of pure research contribution this is not regarded as a very high calibre contribution in the academic world, because when they consider tenure promotion they want to know what kind of innovation and methodology you have contributed... So, if we focus on our relevant problem then we may not be able to publish in international journals, if we gear our research towards the requirements of international journals, our research remains irrelevant to the context".

Thus yet again the scientific paradigm are methodologies of research too are defined by the market oriented publishing companies, which decide what is worthy of publication and what is not.

5. Towards a new epistemology: What may it look like?

Scholars proposed that when developing new approaches in education, one should be careful and avoid labelling it one way or another. They suggested avoiding using the term 'Islamic' in relation to epistemology or educational approaches and other concepts indiscriminately. Once you label it as 'Islamic', they said, you claim that you know what Islamic means or that the concept is strictly and rigidly tied with religion, which is problematic. Islam is the name of the religion and in fact was rarely used even in relation to religion in the medieval times, let alone using it as an adjective to refer to other entities (e.g. philosophy, culture, education, etc). It is in modern times that the term 'Islamic' has been misleadingly used with different concepts and even sometimes abused when it is linked with politics and ideologies (Muborakshoeva 2013a). A scholar thought that utilising the term Islamic as an adjective for epistemology, educational approaches and philosophy of knowledge is misleading. He proposed that it is much better if we refer to our heritage as 'Muslim histories, cultures and civilisations', because:

"...there have been times and moments in cultures of Muslims where there were critical attitudes, opening, lively discussions and creative thinking. This did happen in Muslim contexts and does happen in some contexts until today, for example, in some universities in Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Pakistan and many others there is something very positive going on. Once we substitute the problematic constructions such as 'Islamic education' or 'Islamic philosophy of knowledge' with 'approaches to education in Muslim contexts', then it would immediately open the horizon before us and nobody can claim that there is only one way of knowing and understanding the world. There then rather be philosophies of knowledge, which means there are a spectrum of philosophies or attitudes and no one can say that there is only one way".

Others thought that knowledge acquisition should not have any borders. In the history of Muslim cultures and civilisations, another scholar stated, there have been thinkers such as al-Kindi, the Ikhwan al-Safa, etc. who held the view that "you get knowledge, the best knowledge wherever you can, so you are open to knowledge from everywhere,

because the moment you close your border you will not have access to all knowledge. One way of doing this is firstly to make sure that your distinctiveness lies in the fact of your openness and access to the best quality knowledge. Secondly, you need to ask how this excellence and distinctive capacity of knowledge find their resonance in your own culture, how it is validated by your own culture, by your own language, by your own literature and so on."

Scholars also confirmed that historically there were little or no tensions between reason and revelation in Muslim contexts or at least these tensions were experienced not in a similar manner as they were felt in the Christian world. A scholar thought that the relationship between reason and revelation had a different type of relationship in Muslim contexts historically:

"....the relationship between reason and revelation in Muslim society, that tension that was felt in Europe, it was not felt in a similar manner in Muslim societies. So many of these madrasahs of Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa never felt the need for this sort of a thing [a separation between reason and revelation]. You can have an Al- Beruni, Ibn Hazm, Avicenna, you have an Averroes, you have a context in which reason and revelation were combined in a manner that the two could co-exist.... yes there were tensions, yes there were problems, but you know, it flourished, it coexisted, that was not necessary in those societies. Here [in Europe] there were tensions between the two [revelation and reason] which took place, once it took place it was fired by the industrial revolutions, it was fired by the growth of Europe, it was fired by the dominance of the Western paradigm on the international stage, I know I am simplifying ... but I just want to make the point that now you have a situation in which a once great tradition is a mockery of itself.."

Thus Muslims have great opportunities for learning from their own past educational history and develop a new epistemology relying on that history as well as take the needs of modern societies into account. So what may this new epistemology look like?

In order to delve into what the new epistemology may look like we need to examine and borrow from medieval Muslims' epistemology and approaches to education selectively and critically. As mentioned, there was a diversity of educational approaches yet *all* of them functioned within the overall paradigm of revelation. Most Muslim theologians and legal scholars would equate knowledge and faith whereas the school of Ikhwan us-safa and the Ismaili thinkers would separate the two. For Muslim philosophers, similar to the Aristotelian tradition, knowledge was the perception of things in their realities according to human capacity (Muborakshoeva 2013a). We may want to revive some of these diverse approaches knowing that all of them ultimately will be working under the tawhidic paradigm.

However, it is claimed that such diversity of approaches had its disadvantages even in the Middle Ages and too much plurality would bring about a disharmony in the society. The tenth century scholar, Abu l-Hasan al-Amiri (d.381/992) discusses how the plurality of approaches to knowledge brought about a crisis in knowledge back then (Heck, 2006). In defence though, we do not know the full history of such crises. In light of new developments in educational approaches and methodologies of conducting research we may need to revise some of the tools with which we have examined the historical past of the Muslim education and thought so far. Moreover, Ibn Rushd seems to have been able to create a harmony between these various approaches. He harmonised the existing

differences and propagated that both philosophy and revelation have a unity of purpose and both stem from virtue. For Muslim philosophers, philosophical and prophetic truth is the same, the only difference being that it is attained and expressed differently. The ultimate aim of knowledge is perfection and perfection is happiness, especially for Ibn Sina and those that follow his conviction (Inati, 1998). I think this is the point where almost all schools of thought in Islam agree, that the ultimate aim of knowledge is to get perfection. Once the soul is perfect and close to its originator it is then in the domain of eternal bliss. So why cannot Muslims have diverse approaches to knowledge acquisition when its epistemology and ultimate aim is the same? Critical scholarships on education in contemporary times, especially those who advocate for holistic education, also accentuate on happiness being the ultimate aim of education as opposed to modern education which prepares half educated human beings deprived of any spirituality or sense of beauty and happiness. The indigenous education among Muslims is therefore holistic, if one was to examine it with a more empathetic and creative lens.

6. The holistic roots of education in Muslim contexts

As it was demonstrated in the earlier section, the ultimate aim of education among Muslims has been to prepare a rounded individual who is capable to obtain knowledge via any means to reach perfect knowledge. The understanding is that the ultimate perfect knowledge is with God only, and once you perfect your knowledge you become closer to God. This is a holistic approach to knowledge that takes care of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual enhancement of human being. It is unfortunate that this kind of epistemology was marginalised as a result of the advent of modernity as we discussed earlier. However, it can also be argued that for Muslims especially not everything is lost and there is much evidence of such epistemology being kept alive at some institutional but also non-institutional settings. Some of this legacy is still alive and practiced in the indigenous institutions and is preserved by individual scholars, and by some communities. Back in 2002 when I worked on a project, I interviewed an old man of 85 years old in Tajikistan who could not read and write, but was highly knowledgeable about the prophetic narratives, the wisdom of life, and the ultimate aim of human being on earth. I found out that he obtained this knowledge by attending various religious ceremonies and by listening to and participating in the enlightening debates and discussions on the works and poetry of sages such as Nasir Khusraw, Rumi, Hafiz, Sa'di, and many others (Muborakshoeva 2013b). The man grew up and lived during the Soviet Union.

This indicated to me that if a culture could preserve its traditional modes of knowledge acquisition and transmission under the atheistic Soviet regime, then there is a lot of hope for Muslims to revive their heritage from the vibrant and creative cultures that exist up to date. In many Muslim societies up to date, knowledge is still obtained and transmitted in a plethora of ways ranging from visitation of sacred places and shrines to cultural gatherings, celebration of the Prophet's birthday, attending ceremonies for birth and death, and participating in the related rites and rituals. The modes of knowledge acquisition and transmission in such contexts therefore have remained various for centuries and are not confined to only reading and writing or memorisation, but include poetry, story-telling, literature, debates and discussions, calligraphy and other forms of art.

This approach to education and modes of knowledge acquisition and transmission is very close to what modern proponents of holistic education advocate. Indeed Muslim educationalists have to acquaint themselves with current scholarship on holistic education to appreciate the holistic roots of education in their own cultures and civilisations. Nava (2001) considers three main influences to be at the root and subsequent development of holistic education. The first influence is the various new paradigm shifts in science that challenged the dogmatic ones. The second is the perennial philosophy that refers to spiritual wisdom present throughout history, which is the non-dogmatic essence shared by all great religions. Finally influential educators such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Dewey, Krishnamurti, Montessori, and Steiner were also instrumental in this progression. Holistic education cannot be reduced to methodology only and as such it is a realm of inquiry into teaching and learning, based on principles relating to human consciousness and the relationship between human beings and their universe'. Its purpose is 'to nurture human potential' and it makes a 'transition from self-knowledge to knowledge of the world and from spirituality to society" (Nava, 2001, p. 32). This is very close to Islamic worldview about the ultimate purpose of being a human, how he/she should be educated so that he/she knows oneself first and then knows God, after which he/she is able to serve society. The most vivid summary of such purposes and aims are evident in the works of Muslim non-dogmatic philosophers, theologians, and mystics such as Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Nasir Khusraw, al-Ghazali, Ibn al-Arabi, Rumi and many others. In this sense Muslim heritage is a gold mine for holistic education which has not been fully discovered yet. Mark Halstead is the first scholar to emphasise the huge potential of the Islamic world-view of education He invites us to carefully use the English terminologies related to education, since they may not always convey the same meaning in Arabic language, for example, there being three words for 'education' in Arabic (Halstead, 2004). There are other scholarly movements, especially in Pakistan, to which some of the interviewees referred to earlier. Muslim educationalists have an enormous task of recovering and reviving the best features of such holistic approach to education with the hope of enlightening our reform projects in the future.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this research confirm the concerns raised by scholars of both the 'Islamisation of Knowledge' project as well as those calling for the integration of knowledge (IIIT, 2013; Sardar, 2015) about the dominance of dogmatic scientific paradigm and approaches in education. The notion of 'an educated person', for instance, has completely been transformed as a result of narrow understanding of the methods of teaching and learning in modern educational establishments. In this case it has been closely tied to formal reading and writing and other means of knowledge transmission practiced in Muslim cultures are largely neglected. Most university scholars in Muslim contexts therefore have a rather confused understanding of the imported western epistemology and educational paradigm. As a result scholars at secular universities very often dichotomise their lives and keep their academic affairs and religious identity separate assuming that the one does not affect the other. Scholars at the indigenous institutions, being marginalised and unable to understand and respond to these deeper epistemological issues, take a defensive position and sometimes exert their influences at the secular universities' level and impose the teaching of Islam often in a dogmatic way. Opening departments of

Islamic studies in and of itself is a positive affair, but without resolving the bigger epistemological questions these kinds of initiatives are fruitless and insignificant in terms of advancing the field. The governments too have to take a share of the blame since they often act for their own self-benefit and preservation of power and hence they make alliances with global powers to keep the population under control and obedient.

It is commendable that Muslim academics are becoming cognisant about these issues in education and are searching for the ways to address them. They are critical of the way knowledge is organised, acquired, and produced at universities. They understand that having a dogmatic scientific paradigm in education is part of the problem and further creates epistemological and methodological confusions in research too. The way forward, scholars agree, is coming up with a philosophy of education which unites and not divides knowledge. To achieve this goal Muslim educationalists have to revive the best features of holistic education the roots of which lie in the revelation to the Prophet and the spirituality he advocated.

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