

SOME THOUGHTS ON SCIENCE, QUR'AN AND CURRICULUM REFORM

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ABSTRACT

Man is the supreme creature of God who can think independently and can acquire new knowledge through his deeds, observations and logical operations. Religious belief in his mind, sometimes influences his knowledge structure and social behavior. During the few decades tremendous advancements have been taken place in the fields of scientific knowledge and invention of newer technologies which are making such questions which are giving a heavy jolt in the traditional belief systems of the man. Modern man's obsession with domination of nature and power has produced a science which has severely harmed the ecological systems of the earth. Science today has become not a tool to 'study the nature' but a weapon to 'exploit the nature'. The very existence of our mother planet is now under threat. Qur'an, on the other hand, is a divine book, which emphasizes use of scientific knowledge for the welfare of mankind maintaining the ethical values of man and environmental and ecological balance of the earth. This paper discusses all these issues in short and makes some observations about our responsibilities in this context.

KNOWLEDGE

According to Plato, knowledge is the subset of that which is both true and believed. Also, according to the theory of knowledge by Socrates, knowledge is true belief or more specifically knowledge is justified true belief. That is belief and truth are the two components of knowledge. Knowledge may originate or be derived from the following origins or methods- (a) Observations or Experience, (b) Reason or Logic, (c) Modelling (it is a pragmatic approach seen in computer programming), (d) Testimony, (e) Authority and (f) Revelation (directly from God).

SCIENCE

The term science has been coined from the Latin word 'scientia' meaning knowledge. Science refers to any systematic recorded knowledge. Science had been studied under a branch of philosophy named natural philosophy during the 18th century. Early 1800s, natural philosophy had begun to separate from philosophy and ultimately became an independent branch of knowledge naming science- including both the natural (with biological life) and social sciences (including human behavior and societies). The sciences are studied in the form of hypothesis, theories and laws, both in discovering and describing how things work (natural sciences) and how people think and act (social sciences). Science is the reason-based analysis of sensation upon our awareness. Resting on reason and logic,

scientific theories are formulated and repeatedly tested by analyzing how the collected evidence compares to the theory. Science is sometimes divided into two groups- (i) Empirical science, which means the knowledge that based on scientific experiments and (ii) Applied science, which is the application of experimental results to specific human needs.

THE QUR'AN

The term Qur'an originates from the Arabic verb qara'a, meaning 'he read' or 'he recited'. With the prefix al- the meaning of the word stands- which has been 'sent down' at intervals. Qur'an is the central religious text of Islam. It is the book of divine guidance and direction for mankind, and the final revelation of Almighty Allah. It has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad (S:) by the angel Gibrael over a period of 23 years. Qur'an is the culmination of a series of divine messages that started with that revealed to Adam (AS), the first prophet, and continued with the Tawrat, the Zabur and the Injeel. The aforementioned books are not explicitly included in the Qur'an, but are recognized therein.

Muslims consider the Qur'an to be a guide, a sign of the prophethood of Muhammed (S:) and the truth of the religion.

ISLAM/ QUR'AN AND SCIENCE

The holy Qur'an is richly endowed with scientific indications covering creation and ending of universe, the sky, the sun and moon, the shape of the earth and mountain, meteorology, astronomy and outer space, atmosphere, fresh water, atmospheric pressure on human chest, internal or deep storms and waves in seas and oceans, science of embryology, anatomy and different aspects of medical sciences, science of skin, finger prints, relativity and many more.

But as Qur'an itself express that it is the book of guidance, therefore, it rarely offers detailed accounts of historical events, the text instead typically placing emphasis on the moral significance of an event rather than its narrative sequence. It does not describe natural facts in a scientific manner but teaches that natural and supernatural events are signs of God.

The prestige and value of science and scientists is highly elevated in The Holy Qur'an, because the more man gains knowledge the more he is convinced that God is there. There is no wonder then, that the first Verse came down from heaven, is a clear invitation to read and write.

At the beginning of Islam, the first Muslims truly understood The Holy Qur'an. They took it as a divine order to study seriously and profoundly the different sciences concerning the universe and this world. Anatomy and curative treatment, astronomy, geography, mathematics, chemistry, physics, botany etc. branches of sciences studied carefully by Muslim scientists. At the height of Islam, between the eighth and twelfth centuries A.D., at

a time when restrictions on scientific development were in force in the Christian world, a very large number of studies and discoveries were being made at Islamic Universities. It was there that the remarkable cultural resources of the time were to be found. "Cordova" of Spain was the centre point of world knowledge. This is why scholars from all over Europe went to study at Cordova, just as today people go to the United States to perfect their studies. A very great number of ancient manuscripts have come down to us thanks to cultivated Arabs who acted as the vehicle for the culture of conquered countries. Citing the contribution of Muslim scientists Dr. Morad Hofmann says that the West did not inherit the Hellenic culture, but it was the Muslims in the East who had inherited, developed and added to the Hellenic culture.

PRESENT STATE OF SCIENCE

Vast advances have taken place in the various fields of applied science and technology over the last few decades. Advances in microelectronics, computer sciences and informations, fiber-optics, telecommunications, agriculture and biological sciences, particularly, biotechnology etc. are altering the rate and pattern of growth of development and life style. The new technologies are transdisciplinary and their combined impact is bringing about radical and revolutionary changes in the very structures of knowledge, education and industrial systems. Unfortunately, unlike the greatest and pioneering contribution of past Muslim scholars, Muslims have almost no role in the development of modern science and technology. Modern scientific worldview, based on secular materialist culture of the west, is now a dominant force in most of the world. This dominance, achieved by technological advances, have created an illusion of reality in such a forceful manner that to most people the marvels of the modern technological achievements appear as miracles.

Problems Related to Advancement of Science:

But the advances in science and technology are themselves introducing new limitations and constraints for the underdeveloped and developing countries. The close link between the scientific and technological capabilities and the economic growth, the increasing costs of R&D works and emergence of new fields of science with accentuated complexities in the institutional framework are all creating difficulties for the developing countries for participation in this new innovation. Technological advancements have made the world divided into two groups- (i) technology export and (ii) technology import countries. As a result countries like us are becoming more and more dependent on the developed countries for our developing activities.

There also have other sides of the advancement. Science today is not only limited to the study of nature, rather it is attempting to replace traditional epistemological and ontological foundations of knowledge. This encroachment of science in a domain traditionally held by Religion has given rise to the debates about the relationship of science and religion, their mutual points of convergence and divergence and other related issues. These questions have been and are being debated by the followers of all regions as science keeps on encroaching further and further into the belief systems of contemporary human beings through rapid advances in such areas as biotechnology, embryology and genetic

engineering. These are not merely philosophical debates; there are real-life issues forcing human beings to make choices which affect the most fundamental aspects of existence. Modern science comes with its own values and ethics and attempts in competition with the religious worldview.

OUR DUTIES: CURRICULUM REFORMS

Before going to make any suggestions about our present duties and work plan for future actions, I want to point out some problems prevailing in the Muslim Ummah.

The most important points are as follows-

- i) Lack of Education
- ii) Lack of modern knowledge in Science and other faculties
- iii) Lack of modern institutes for higher education and Centre of Excellences for higher research
- iv) Lack of capable visionary leadership/ Intellectual Crisis
- v) Lack of awareness about our own problems
- vi) Lack of mutual cooperation and fellow feelings for other members of the community

This assessment shows that there is an urgent and dire need for a systematic, epistemological reform process for

- Mastery of Modern Disciplines, and the critical assessment of their methodologies, research findings, and theories within the Islamic perspective.
- Mastery of the Islamic Legacy, and the critical assessment of Islamic scholarship
- Creative Synthesis of Islamic Legacy and modern knowledge; a creative leap to bridge over the gap of centuries of non-development.

To achieve this goal there should be consensus among the Muslim Ummah:

- To eradicate illiteracy and speed up science and technology education to equip the young students with modern knowledge and skills to be a workforce for meeting national demand.
- Science education up to secondary or higher secondary level should be made compulsory and sufficient scientific and technological infrastructures should be built up.
- The need of high caliber scientists and engineers for sustained industrial and technological development in any country is well recognized. To meet this goal modern institute for higher studies and research should be set up and adequate number of capable teachers should be recruited.
- 'Centre of Excellences' for higher research should be setup in a pre-planned and coordinated manner to train large number of promising scientists among the community whose talent will be of world class and whose mind will be full of divine belief and thought. Also, fund should be created to offer large number of scholarships for the students of higher education.

- Academic exchange of experienced teachers among the educational institutes of the member states should be accelerated to maintain higher level of education.

Curriculum reforms in our university

In the Islamic University we have a course named Islamic Studies which is compulsory for all Muslim students. The contents of the course can be updated in the light of epistemological approach giving emphasis on the contribution of muslim scholars in the development of sciences.

Introduction of new course in the science faculty just now may be problematic. Because, the mentality of a major portion of the educated people of our country is no different than that of the Western secular notion. They want to see religion separated from science. In this context, what we can do is to make a work plan to change our mindset first. Through series of discussions (formal and informal), seminars and workshops including more and more teachers of the science faculty, we can make ourselves ready for making desired reform in the curriculum.

CONCLUSION:

There is no contradiction between science and Islam. Quar'an places emphasis on scientific education. There are also many prominent Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (S:) in favor of acquiring knowledge. But there is, definitely, difference in the approach between the western scientific culture and Islamic Spiritual approach. "Scientism", which is based on secular materialist values of the west, wants to dominate on the nature and has already made our planet at risk. Islamic approach of science, opposite to 'scientism' recognizes that the message of God is relevant to each and every sphere of human activity, God has created this universe with a purpose, and He has made Man his representative for an appointed term. The model and example to be followed is that of Prophet Muhammad (S). Nature is not to be exploited but should be understood and treated as a trust given to him by the creator.

At the end, I want to finish with these words- Please come forward and utter in a single voice, Science for Humanity, Science for development, Science for peace, Science for welfare, Science for love and Science for Divine.

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