

CHAPTER THREE

DEFINITION AND GOALS OF ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE

3.1 The Need for a Clear Working Definition

Though several notions and definitions of Islamization of knowledge have been given by many scholars committed to this noble and gigantic task, some people still find it difficult to comprehend and accept the definitions. The moment people hear the phrase "Islamization of knowledge" they begin to argue that knowledge is neutral or it is already Islamic; hence it does not require Islamization.

There is, therefore, a need for an explanation of the meaning of knowledge in Islam, and for showing that knowledge differs from mythologies and has degrees of being perfect or being polluted with bias and human error. When knowledge is perfect and neutral it does not require Islamization; when the contrary is the case, it does. When definitions and notions of Islamization of knowledge are not accompanied by these explanations people are bound to find them unacceptable or inconceivable.

Condensed and highly philosophical definitions are also not easy to be comprehended by the generality of people. Working definitions may be more understandable and they have the advantage of providing a guide on what a person can do when implementing the defined idea or task.

Definitions are essential in whatever we do. We fumble or fall into error when we lack a proper understanding of a concept or concepts related to tasks assigned to us. The example below would be used to illustrate this point.

An English lady had just prepared three different dishes: a plate of rice for herself, of yam pottage for her husband and a bowl of porridge made from oats for their little child. She had placed these things on a table and beside two other bowls, one containing processed honey and the other filled with contaminated yoghurt. She had forgotten to wash away the yoghurt and also to sweeten the porridge with honey. When the little child began to cry the lady asked a newly employed housemaid to sweeten the porridge with honey and to give it to the child. Unfortunately, the housemaid was unable to comprehend the command because the terms, 'porridge' and 'honey' were new to her and they could mean anything on the table. She spent five minutes considering the following options and finally, but mistakenly, chose the last one:

- (a) To add honey to the yam pottage
- (b) To add honey to the porridge
- (c) To add yam pottage to the porridge
- (d) To add honey to the yoghurt
- (e) To add some porridge into the bowl of honey

A person lacking proper understanding of the concept of Islamization of knowledge can make similar mistakes. For instance, in trying to islamize Economics he may end up economizing Islam. This mistake is similar to the option chosen by the housemaid. Trying to islamize what Islam prohibits is just like option (d): sweetening contaminated yoghurt with honey. So it is improper to islamize, for instance, the principles and practice of bribery, prostitution, magic, gambling, alcohol brewing and sorcery. It is also a waste of time for one to try to islamize what is already Islamic.

3.2 A Working Definition of Islamization of Knowledge

It is better to use the phrase "Islamization of knowledge" than "re-Islamization of knowledge". The latter phrase is only applicable to polluted knowledge while the former applies to both polluted knowledge and mythologies which have never been Islamic. Mythologies coming from people that have never been aware of Islam and its teachings do not even have the status of polluted knowledge, because only what is present can be polluted.

Islamization of knowledge simply refers to an attempt through which those aspects of the body and purpose of knowledge and of the process and methodologies of discovering, validating, imparting and applying it, *which oppose Islam*, are identified and made subservient to the Islamic worldview.

The following could be understood from this definition:

- (a) The scope of Islamization or what needs to be Islamized includes what is known or is to be known, why it is known and how the knowledge is discovered, approved and taught to others and utilized.
- (b) Only those aspects of the things mentioned under (a) which do not conform to Islam need to be Islamized. This means there are other aspects which are in conformity with Islam because they are purely neutral or are facts.
- (c) Islamization of knowledge does not stop at recasting or remoulding past achievements in the field of knowledge; it requires that all future endeavours to acquire and impart knowledge have to conform with Islam.

- (d) There are two key steps in Islamizing knowledge: (1) identifying the aspects of knowledge, of its purpose and of the methodologies and procedures of acquiring, validating, imparting and applying it which are contrary to the Islamic creed and (2) making these aspects to conform with Islam and to serve its cause.

3.3 Islamization Scale

The conformity or otherwise of the object and the methodology of acquiring knowledge or imparting it to others to the Islamic worldview all differ. For instance, the object, (i.e. what is known), could be purely Islamic but the methodology of acquiring the knowledge or the purpose for which it is acquired could oppose Islamic teachings. Knowing that $2+2=4$ does not oppose Islam, hence it does not require Islamization but leading a child to acquire this knowledge by slapping his left cheek twice and then the right cheek twice so as to hurt him is un-Islamic. Similarly teaching this lesson with the intention of enabling the child to steal four eggs from his mother's kitchen and bring them to school is unacceptable.

One needs to master a subject or discipline and also the teachings of Islam related to it before being able to identify the aspects of the discipline that need to be Islamized. This also applies to the purpose of the discipline and its methodologies. An Islamization scale reflecting the "methodologies and degree of knowledge" scale explained in Chapter Two can help by providing a guide on how much Islamization effort is required for the Islamization of any particular discipline.

The Islamization scale, as shown below, has two extremes: complete ignorance is placed at zero while perfect knowledge is placed at one. A body of knowledge that is perfect is also purely neutral and does not need to be Islamized because Islam is

about truth and what comes from Allah, the Omniscient, is perfectly true. It is man that has little knowledge as the following verse of the Holy Qur'an states:

Of knowledge it is only a little
that is communicated to you.
(Qur'an 17:85)

Islamization Scale

0	0.5	1
complete ignorance (purely unIslamic)		perfect knowledge (purely Islamic)

Pure mythologies and complete ignorance are placed at zero while imperfect or polluted knowledge comes in between zero and one. A perfect body of knowledge is placed at one and it does not require Islamization.

Disciplines like Civil and Electrical Engineering, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics and Geology can have a high score on the Islamization scale. Compared to the social sciences and humanities, the natural and applied sciences require less Islamization effort as far as their contents are concerned. However, in terms of purpose, the natural and applied sciences require a lot of Islamization. Taboos and superstitious beliefs being passed from one generation to another both formally and informally can be placed at zero or something near to that on the Islamization scale, meaning that they need total Islamization. This indicates that Islamization of knowledge is not concerned with what comes from only the West as our culture, beliefs and taboos also distort our thinking, perception and interpretation of facts.

It should be noted that facts can be obtained in every discipline as well as fallacious claims based on ignorance and ill-motives. For instance, a fallacious claim related to the non-existence of God can come from Biology, Sociology and superstition. Thus every bit of the content of a discipline can be put on the Islamization scale.

Another thing to note is that the natural sciences are not always perfect and neutral simply because they are based on empirical evidences. Harris (1979:5-27) made a detailed discussion of the limitations of empiricism. A summary and some illustrations of the main points he raised are provided here:

First, derived conclusions cannot be logically valid for generalisation because there could be exceptions.

Secondly, methodology of data collection is always theory laden; that is, an investigator has preconceptions and motives which influence his or her choice of methodology of investigation and this subsequently affects the outcome:

Thirdly, in trying to gain data about the world, filtration mechanisms operate between our sensation of the world and our perception or knowledge of it. Such mechanisms include:

- (a) Psychological delusions – insanity, for instance, affects our perception and there is a difficulty in knowing who is a sane person and who is not. Galileo, for instance, was regarded as being insane when he publicised his scientific findings.
- (b) Our conceptual schemes may lead us to describe the world as what it is not if they are inadequate. An ice block, for instance, can be described as a white or a cold

stone by some one lacking the appropriate conceptual scheme.

- (c) Social pressure may lead us to accept things simply because they are stated by famous authorities or the majority of people.
- (d) Prejudice can lead us to perceive more than what we see or to be selective in noticing things.
- (e) Our present knowledge, experience and pre-conception can allow us to perceive what other people cannot perceive. A child that is born and reared in a noisy environment may not feel the impact of noise on having a sound sleep as a child coming from a different environment may.
- (f) Mental sets also affect our perception. For instance when reading a sentence that reads “The boy is is lazy” we may fail to notice the double “is” simply because our minds have been set to have the correct sentence.

3.4 The Goals of Islamization of Knowledge

There are three broad goals of Islamizing knowledge. They can be called the three W's of Islamization of knowledge as they are centred around what is known, how it is known and why it is known. They are as follows:

- (a) to ensure that what is known or to be known formally or informally does not oppose Islamic teachings and aspirations (the what);

- (b) to ensure that the procedures, methodologies and means of acquiring, validating, imparting and applying knowledge are in line with the Islamic precept (the how); and
- (c) to ensure that the purpose of acquiring and applying knowledge does not oppose Islamic teachings (the why).

The place where knowledge is discovered and who makes the discovery do not matter so long as these goals are achieved.

The working definition explained in this chapter is built upon these three goals. The goals also reflect the scope of Islamization of knowledge. The body of knowledge [what we learn, teach and write in textbooks and papers or say during lectures and discussions], the procedures and methodologies of acquiring, validating, imparting and utilizing knowledge, and the purpose of knowledge, form the scope of Islamization of knowledge. The body of knowledge must not oppose the teachings of Islam, the procedures and methods must be in line with Islamic precepts and the purpose of acquiring and applying knowledge must be to worship Allah alone. Performing the religious rites, serving as Allah's vicegerent on Earth and engaging in lawful undertakings to earn a good living on Earth, constitute the worship of Allah.