Article

Challenges to Islamic Education

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges to Islamic education in Muslim majority societies with special reference to the institutionalization of Islamic education. Understanding these challenges requires a discussion of the concept of knowledge and education within the Islamic worldview, which will serve as the point of departure of this paper. Given the long historical background of Islamic education in the diverse Muslim societies around the globe, this essay will limit itself to a brief sketch of these developments.

1. Introduction

In line with the recent interest in Islamic education, especially in the area of policy-oriented prescriptive studies, discussions have often focused on Islamic educational institutions, namely *madrassahs* (Islamic religious schools or its variants such as *Pondok*, *pesantren*), without connecting them to the larger issues such as the concept and role of education in Islam. Discussions on Islamic education generally fall into one of two categories; to the first relates to the normative question as to what is the Islamic concept of knowledge, while the other addresses empirical issues such as how Muslims understand knowledge (Panjawani, 2004). This essay avoids such dichotomization which has not yielded a better understanding of Islamic education, assuming both to be important in understanding the state of Islamic education and its future trajectories.

2. Knowledge and Education in Islam

Knowledge and education are central to, and integral parts of, Islam. The word knowledge (*'ilm*) is mentioned in the Qur'an more than 700 times in 87 different forms; it is the third most referred to concept after Allah (over 2800 times) and *raab* (over 950 times). In the Qur'an the word *'alim* occurs in 140 places, while al-*'ilm* in 27. *Qalam* is found in two places, *al-kitab*in in 230 verses, among which *al-kitab* for the Qur'an occurs in 81 verses. Other words associated with writing occur in 319 verses. It is worth recalling that the Islamic revelation started with the word *iqra'* ('read!' or 'recite!'): 'Read! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists), He has created man from a clot (a piece of thick coagulated blood) Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not' (Qur'an 96: 1-4). In similar vein, another verse in Qur'an says, 'And Allah brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and hearts that haply ye might give thanks' (Qur'an, 16:78). The significance and importance attached to knowledge in the Qur'an is clearly stated in a passage indicating that the one who knows and the one who does not are by no standard on the same footing (Qur'an 39:9). There are hundreds of Prophetic sayings and traditions that encourage Muslims to acquire all types of knowledge from any corner of the world. One *hadith* (saying of the Prophet Muhammad - pbuh) records the prophet saying that 'A person who follows a path for acquiring knowledge, Allah will make easy the passage to Paradise for him.' Another *hadith* states, 'a Muslim is never satiated in his quest for good (knowledge)

till it ends in Paradise.'

As a 'religion of book' Islam's association with codified scripture is incontrovertible, however, oral tradition has a critical importance in Islam as the Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh, 570 - 630) at a time and in a society which was predominantly oral, and the Qur'an wasn't compiled and canonized until after his death, particularly during the era of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan (653-656). Furthermore, the missionary goal, i.e. to spread the word of God- the Qu'ran, and proselytizing required that religious knowledge be transmitted in a uniform manner. However, it is well to bear in mind that despite emphasis on knowledge in the Qur'an and prophetic tradition, 'the Qur'an does not address explicitly the form Islamic education should take' (Marshallsay, 2012). While *ilm* remains the word to describe the concept akin to knowledge, many Islamic scholars and Islamic historians argue that the term knowledge does not capture the essence of 'ilm as envisaged in the Islamic lexicon. Rosenthal (1970/2007, 1-2) has underscored the point that,

Arabic 'ilm is fairly well rendered by our "knowledge". However, "knowledge" falls short of expressing all the factual and emotional contents of 'ilm. For 'ilm is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion. In fact, there is no other concept that has been operative as a determinant of Muslim civilization in all its aspects to the same extent as 'ilm. This holds good even for the most powerful among the terms of Muslim religious life such as, for instance, tawhîd "recognition of the oneness of God," ad-dîn "the true religion", and many others that are used constantly and emphatically. None of them equals 'ilm in depth of meaning and wide incidence of use. There is no branch of Muslim intellectual life, of Muslim religious and political life, and of the daily life of the average Muslim that remained untouched by the all-pervasive attitude toward "knowledge" as something of supreme value for Muslim being. 'Ilm is Islam, even if the theologians have been hesitant to accept the technical correctness of this equation.

How knowledge should be categorized has remained an important issue among Islamic scholars for centuries and has influenced not only the institutionalization of education but also the content and the pedagogy with ramifications for the Muslim community, both past, and present. There is a distinct, rich and long tradition of discussion on Islamic epistemology among Muslim thinkers in past centuries. Islamic scholars, such as al-Farabi (870-950), ibn Sina (c.980- 1037), al-Ghazali

(1058-1111), Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi (1236-1311), Ibn Khaldun (1332- 1406), to name but a few, have addressed Islamic epistemology and have presented various classifications. Drawing on their works and critiques knowledge is typically categorized into two categories, although they are variously named. Simply stated, these two categories are revealed and acquired: 'aqli and naqli qli. Some have differentiated among these two as *'ilm al shahadat* (knowledge of the seen), acquired by direct interaction with the physical environment, and *'ilm al ghaib* (knowledge of the unseen), through revelation. The unseen can be absolute, *ghaib mutlaq*, or relative, *ghaib nisbi*. Acquisition of knowledge requires the use of human intellect (*'aql*). The classification is also made based on obligations: some knowledge is individually obligatory, *fard 'ayn*, whereas other knowledge is collectively obligatory, *fard kifayah*. There is also a tradition that differentiates knowledge between presential (huduri) and attained (husuli) knowledge. *'Ilm al-huduri* (knowledge by presence) is what is directly known through one's experience of the object, while *'ilm al-husuli* (acquired knowledge) is representational or conceptual knowledge**.** Despite such differentiations, Islamic scholars have all insisted that the goal of knowledge must necessarily be 'the recognition of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence' (Al-Attas, 1991).

To seek knowledge, one must be educated – through institutions or otherwise. In Arabic language, there is no single word that describes 'education.' Although *Tarbiyyah* is commonly used to describe education, there is a debate whether the term alone is sufficient to represent the spirit and principles of Islamic education. Two other terms, *Tal'im*, and *Ta'dib* are used too. The latter has gained considerable attention in recent decades. *Ta'lim* stems from the root word of 'allama (to know, to be informed, to perceive, to learn, to discern, to teach). Therefore this refers to the imparting and receiving of knowledge through instruction and teaching. *Tarbiyyah* comes from the root word raba (to grow, to increase, to rear, spiritual nurturing), which implies a state of ethical and spiritual nurturing in developing the individual's potential and guidance of the child to the state of complete maturity. *Ta'dib* is derived from the root word aduba (to be refined, disciplined, cultured, well mannered), which suggests the social aspects of a human being including the process of character development and good social behavior. Drawing on the works of Al-Attas, Wan Daud insists that, "The concept of ta'dib, if properly understood and competently explicated, is the correct concept for education in Islam, and not ta'lim or tarbiyah which are currently in vogue among Muslims all over the

world, because ta'dib already includes within its conceptual structure the elements of knowledge ('ilm), instruction (ta'lim), and good breeding (tarbiyah)" (Daud, 2007)

Conceptualization of knowledge, its binary classification (largely a contribution of al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun) and insistence on education as the 'progressive initiations of pupils into the received truths of faith' have impacted upon the content, pedagogy, and nature of educational institutions. How Muslims have encountered social challenges at various times, bear marks of these conceptual issues more than it is acknowledged by Islamic scholars. But it is also necessary to underscore that these were not divinely ordained because as I have previously mentioned neither the Qur'an nor Hadiths have laid out the modus operandi of education; instead, they emerged as education was institutionalized and debates on Islamic epistemology ensued, particularly between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries.

3. Institutionalization of Islamic Education and Challenges

The history of Islamic education can be divided into five eras: the foundational era, the era of expansion, the colonial era, the post-colonial era, and the era of Islamization of knowledge. Each era presented different sets of challenges for the education of the Muslim community and Muslim rulers responded with various measures including reforms and innovations and paved the way for the rise of new social classes. These responses varied not only temporally and spatially but also were intrinsically linked to the socio-political environments, particularly whether or not the Muslim community held political power. These responses set the contours and content of education and contributed to the continuity as much as to changes in Islamic epistemology.

3.1 *The Foundational Era*

When Muhammad received his revelations in the seventh century, organized educational institutions were nonexistent in Arabia. With the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) beginning to spread the message, the new converts to Islam began meeting in groups to discuss the revelations and learn the rituals from the Prophet and his companions. This gave rise to nonformal educational arrangements, described by historians as *halaqa* (study circles, also referred to as majlish). Soon this became a model emulated elsewhere. Most of these early study circles were centered on places for prayer—*masjid* (mosque), but some emerged in the homes of the

Prophet's companions and new converts. [1] The latter provided residential facilities as well. For example, Arkam bin Abul Arkam, who embraced Islam at a very early phase, dedicated his home to teaching and learning the Qur'an in Makkah at a time when the Prophet and his companions were being persecuted. This tradition of teaching in the residence of Arkam bin Abul Arkam continued even after the Prophet migrated (*hijra*) to Yathrib (later named Madinat un-Nabi, commonly known as Medina) in 622. Soon after entering Medina, the Prophet built a mosque (later known as al-Masjid an-Nabawi, the Mosque of the Prophet) which included facilities for learning and teaching. A shaded area (*suffah*) was built adjacent to the mosque to accommodate out of town guests and educational activities.

This pattern of education, particularly teaching the Qur'an and the practices of the Prophet (*sunnah*), continued throughout the era of the four Caliphs (632–661) who succeeded the Prophet as the spiritual and temporal leaders of the Muslims.[2] Over time, education became linked to two institutions—*halaqa* and mosques. The former used to be created by one or more scholars, while the latter was centered on the mosques where illustrious teachers would spend time with the eager students. Historical accounts suggest that the methods used during this period, especially during the lifetime of the Prophet, were: lecturing (*kulliyyah*), memorization (*hifz*), discussion (*muhadathah*), debating (*mujadalah*), and traveling (*rihlah*).

Another educational institution which existed at that time and continued throughout the four centuries following the commencement of Islamic education (that is, the seventh through tenth centuries) in Arabia is the maktab, also called *kuttab*. The maktab was "for removal of illiteracy and the teaching of reckoning, grammar, poetry, history (*akhbar*), and above all, the Qur'an. . . . The maktab could be held in a private house, shop, or any other place and was presided over by a mu'allim [teacher]" (Tibawi, 1962). There is general agreement among historians that "most of those who sought education stopped at the first stage. Thereafter, the seekers after knowledge pursued different courses in the circles of traditionalists, linguists, mystics, philosophers, etc" (Tibawi 1962:226). Mehdi Nakosteen provides a similar picture in his discussion of educational organizations in the Muslim world between 750 and 1350 (Nakosteen, 1964).

3.2 *The Era of Expansion*

Islamic civilization began to expand during the reign of the Caliphs (8th century) and

continued with the Ummayad, Abbasayaid and Fatimid dynasties until the thirteenth century during which time learning, education, and knowledge production became the hallmark of the Muslim empires. Greek classics were translated into Arabic and Islamic philosophers engaged with Aristotelian tradition resulting in an environment of vibrant debate on theology (*kalam*), and philosophy (*falsafa*). The expansion, during and beyond this period (under the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires), created a great heterogeneity among the Muslim community which served as a need for diversity in educational philosophy, institutions, and pedagogy. As Reetz (2010) aptly noted, "Dissent and divisions appeared, reflecting different political pulls and power interests. The various lands that were occupied by Islamic armies or the inhabitants of which had converted to Islam on their own contributed different cultural traditions, languages and interpretations. Islamic education became necessary to ensure the consistency of God's message. This diversity of Islamic lands, in turn, created a range of educational standards and traditions in the name of Islam" (Reetz 2010. 108). Centers of learning, research and innovation were founded which led to the inclusion of newer disciplines. *Bayt al-Hikma* (the House of Wisdom) in Baghdad, founded during the Abbasayaid period and *Al-Zaytuna* in Tunis, founded in the 8th century, are cases in point. Islamic epistemology and Greek philosophy influenced both theological and educational debates. During this period institutionalization of education took on a new dimension with the increase of *madrassahs*.

The exact time of the establishment of the first madrassah as a separate, distinct, and exclusively educational institution is contentious. The most widespread narrative claims that the madrassah established in Baghdad in 1067 (known as Madrassah al-Nizamiya) by Nizam ul-Mulk Tusi (1018–1092), the *vizir* (prime minister) of the Seljuk Turk Sultan Alp Arslan, was the first institutionalized madrassah. But available historical accounts show that madrassahs began to be established during the reign of Abbasayaid Caliph al-Ma'mun (786–833) (Numani quoted in Sattar, 1994). Some historians suggest that "both as term a and as institution, the madrasah existed before Nizam was born" (Tibawi 1962, 236). Leaving aside the establishment of al-Azhar in Cairo in 975 by the fourth Fatmid Caliph al-Muiz li Dinullah (also known as Al-Muizz Abu-Tamim Mu'd), educational institutions called madrassahs were established in other cities contemporaneously. Ibn al-Imad al-Hanbali mentions a madrassah founded by al-Imam abu Bakr bin Faurik al-Isfahani, who died in 1014, in Nishapur (currently located in Iran) (Kaur 1990, 15). Therefore, the madrassah in question was established well before the Nizamiya madrassah in Baghdad and

around the time when al-Azhar was founded. In Nishapur, local people are reported to have built a madrassah for Abu Ishaq Ibrahim Asfaraini in the late tenth century. Asfaraini died in 1027. He was succeeded by Allama Baihaqi, who continued teaching in the madrassah until his death in 1065. "The Turkish ruler Sultan Mahmud (971–1030) is said to have established a madrasa at Ghazni in present-day Afghanistan in the early eleventh century" (Sikand 2005, 25). Furthermore, Said Amir Arjomand suggests that the Nizamiya madrassah was probably not the first madrassah founded by Nizam ul-Mulk; instead, he started establishing madrassahs "during the first year of his vizierate of Khurasan (1058)" (Arjomand 1999, 263, 293, 269).

These accounts demonstrate that although a watershed in the history of Islamic education, the Madrassah al-Nizamiya, which later became a model for other madrassahs, particularly for its curriculum named dars--i-Nijamiya, is not the first institutionalized madrassah. Instead, "the pattern for the emergence of madrasah, or its counterparts, was long in the making. Far from being an innovation, it was a natural development of the practice of the preceding centuries" (Tibawi 1962, 225–238. 226). This tradition helped the spread of madrassahs throughout the regions under Muslim rule (Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt). Nizam ul-Mulk alone is credited with founding madrassahs at least in "eleven cities including Isfahan, Balkh, Herat, and Marv in northeastern Iran and Basra and Mosul in Mesopotamia" (Arjomand 1999, 270).

According to Barazangi (1995) the curricula of these madrassahs include Qur'anic *talqin* and Arabic grammar, *tafsir* (exegesis), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *h'adith*, *usul al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), *usul al-'hadith* (principles of narration), and the biography of the Prophet and al-sahabah (the Prophet's companions). These institutions also taught classical sciences (astronomy, geography, and medicine) and Arabic *adab* (literature).

There were several other developments which influenced the educational landscape. One of these developments was the emergence and consequently the consolidation of four *madhabs* (schools of thought). "As Islam spread to new areas, Muslims were confronted with new situations for which neither the Qur'an nor the Hadith contained any specific advice. This led, from the middle of the eighth century onwards, to the founding of a number of schools (sing. *mazhab*, pl. *mazahib*) [also spelled *madhab*] of Islamic jurisprudence or fiqh" (Sikand 2005, 34). Although the initial number of

madhabs within the Sunni sect was in the hundreds, over time they dwindled to just four (the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Shafi'i, and the Hanbali, named after their progenitors Abu Hanifa al-Numan, Malik ibn Anas, Muhammad ibn Idris as-Shafi'i, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, respectively). Similarly, one school of thought emerged within the Shi'a fold, the Ja'fari school (named after Ja'far as-Sadiq). The rise of various *madhabs* indicates scholarly debates between learned persons and within the Muslim community at large, and the practice of *ijtihad* (creative interpretation of the original Islamic laws) as opposed to *taqlid* (accepting and following the verdicts of expert scholars of Islamic *fiqh* in their exposition and interpretation of Islamic law). The debates and discussions also demonstrate that *istildal* and *istridrak* (deductive and inductive reasoning), *quiyas* (analogical reasoning), and *rai* (informed opinion) as methods of acquiring knowledge were utilized.

While these mark great progress in creation and transmission (*nass*) of knowledge, several other developments shaped the trajectory of intellectual developments. The most important among them is the binary classification of knowledge – *naqli* and *aqli*. This classification, credited to al-Ghazali (1058-1111), and Ibn Khaldun (1332- 1406) stymied future progress in the sense that it undermined the tradition of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) and emphasized *taqlid*. Halsted has noted this development with great concern: "Until the time of al-Ghazali (1058-1111), the debate was fairly evenly balanced between the philosophers and rationalists on the one hand (who believed, among other things, that rationality was separate from religion and indeed could be used to provide objective, independent support for religion) and the more orthodox theologians (commonly known as as-Ash'ariyya, who believed that rationality is valid only within the boundaries defined by religion) on the other. This is commonly known as the debate between the Mutazilite and the Asharite schools of thought.

The Mutazilite school, which emerged in the eighth century as a result of the strong impact of Greek philosophy, challenged the dominant notion that the Qur'an was the eternal word of God. The Mutazilites emphasized reason and justice and relied on a synthesis between reason and revelation in regard to the interpretation of the Qur'an. This was countered by the group of Islamic scholars who would later be named Asharite (after the founder Abu al-Hasan bin Isma'el al-Ash'ari, 873–935). The Asharites' view was that comprehension of the unique nature and characteristics of God was beyond human capability. They undermined the role of human free will and insisted on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an (Armstrong, 1994; Martin et al. 1997). In the face of growing challenges from the Mutazilites, the

rulers of the Abbasid Empire took a special interest in advancing Asharite theology. Nizam ul-Mulk's decision to appoint al-Ghazali, the most prominent Asharite theologian, initially at the madrassah in Nishapur and later as the chair of law at Nizamiya in Baghdad is a testimony to this effort. The impact of al-Ghazali's scholarship was immediately felt: "With the advent of al-Ghazali, however, the philosophical and rationalistic schools of thought lost ground" (Malstead 2004, 517, 529, 518). "This epistemological framework determined the official Sunni Islamic education curriculum and its pedagogy at all levels for the next seven centuries.'' It served as a gatekeeping mechanism to evaluate, reject, or Islamize internal knowledge production and external knowledge (e.g. Greek, Persian, Chinese, and Indian)" (Niyozov and Memon 2011, 11).

The other significant development of this era, which still influences Islamic education in all Muslim societies, was the professionalization of knowledge and the emergence of *fuqaha* (scholars of jurisprudence) and *ulema* (religious scholars) as distinct entities with great influence at the royal courts and enormous respect within the society (Riaz, 2008). 'They shaped and increasingly controlled religious knowledge and application' (Reetz 2010, 107). Between the 8th and 12th centuries not only did Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) become more systematic and standardized, it also became the principal and most revered field of knowledge for it was considered as the 'reflection of God's will' (Marshallsay 2012, 180-190). Consequently, the differences between fuqaha and ulema became blurred as all were considered ulema. More importantly, they started to play 'a more central role in education and public affairs' (Heffner 1995, 1-55, 7), became the 'interpreters and guardians of Islamic law' (Esposito 1998, 52) and 'the final authorities in religious and worldly matters' (Talbani 1996, 66, 70, 82).

3.3 The Colonial Era

Colonialism is not merely the occupation of lands, the subjugation of its people and exploitation of the resources; it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which brings profound changes to the social, political and economic structures of the colonized country. Western colonial rule in a significant number of Muslim countries, beginning in the 17th century, was no exception. With the advent of European colonial powers, Islamic education faced serious challenges. The lack of critical thinking, the absence of incisive inquiry and the rejection of new innovations in Muslim societies, all of which can be traced back to the preeminence of *taqlid* since the 13th century,

resulted in stagnancy in the educational arena. Western colonial invasions came on top of this. Cook has aptly described this as a 'lethal combination' that 'served to dim Islam's preeminence artistic and scientific world' (Cook, 1999).

Notwithstanding the indirect impact on education via social, economic and political policies, colonialism had four direct impacts on Islamic education; they are: the loss of state patronage for madrassahs, the introduction of secular education as the preferred alternative, changes in the legal system and the confiscation of financial resources of Islamic educational institutions. The British colonial administration in India, for example, maintained an apparent distance from education in the early years of colonial rule but became a primary actor though the establishment of the Calcutta Madrassah in 1780 (the curriculum was drastically changed within ten years), the Sanskrit College in Benaras in 1791, Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800, the Hindu College in 1817 and the Sanskrit College in 1824 in Calcutta. The adoption of an education policy in 1835 made the discontinuation of government support to madrassahs and other traditional educational institutions an official policy. By 1854, the government had taken control of the entire education sector and embarked on a project to transform indigenous schools into Western-style institutions through grants-in-aid to private schools. These changes marginalized the traditional educational institutions, particularly madrassahs because eligibility for grants-in-aid "required adoption of a curriculum focused on math, science, and language, and removal of all reference to religion to a discrete 'religion' class. […] It also required that educators receive formal teacher training, which gradually shifted teaching from respected local figures, often religious authorities who did not teach as a primary occupation, to full-time educators with teaching certificates issued by colonial authorities" (Langhor 2005, 161-189, 162). In Egypt, the reforms under Muhammad Ali (1769-1849) and under British rule (1882- 1923) also had similar requirements and impacts: for example, In order to compete for government aid, *kuttabs* had to focus on reading, writing and arithmetic, abstain from teaching foreign languages and accept monthly inspection (Tignor 1966, 46-47). Langhor notes, "While the primary purpose of pre-colonial kuttab education had been to teach religious rituals and aid in memorization of key religious texts, in the new government schools religion was significantly minimized in favor of an emphasis on secular subjects, with the prominence of religion in education inversely proportional to the student's economic status" (Langhor 2005, 161, 189, 165). Impacts of French colonialism on educational system of Morocco, documented painstakingly by Spencer D Segalla

(Segalla 2009), were similar.

In the pre-colonial era, ulema served at various levels of administration and *qadis* were in charge of administering justice due to their knowledge of *fiqh* and had the authority to issue *fatawa* (religious edicts). But under the colonial administration, and a largely imported judicial system, *qadis* lost their influence and power. Take for example the experience of colonial India. "[In] 1772 [British colonial administration] established a hierarchy of civil and criminal courts, which were charged with the task of applying indigenous legal norms 'in all suits regarding inheritance, marriage, caste, and other religious usages or institutions'. Indigenous norms comprised 'the laws of the Koran with respect to Muhammadans', and the laws of the Brahmanic' Shasters' with respect to Hindus. Although the courts followed British models of procedure and adjudication, the plan provided for maulavis and pandits to advise the courts on matters of Islamic and Hindu law, respectively. By the early nineteenth century, the system of courts had been expanded, a new legal profession had been established, and a growing body of statute and court practice extended the influence of the colonial state" (Anderson 1993, 165-185). Anderson further notes, that in 1872, Islamic canons of evidence were supplanted by British-based rules; by 1875, new colonial codes displaced the Anglo-Muhammadan law in all subjects except family law and certain property transactions; and in 1864, under Crown rule, the Court maulavis were dispensed with altogether. The educational institutions that trained these legal scholars consequently lost their appeal to the Muslim community and their economic significance.

Traditionally, Islamic educational institutions were financed through *awaqaf* (sing. *waqf*) or Islamic endowments (property that cannot be transferred and that is therefore inalienable). But in many colonized societies, colonial powers brought them under strict control. This enabled the administration to establish control over the autonomous ulema and thereby undermine the traditional religious institutions. In the case of Egypt, Muhammad Ali (1805–1848) was the first to take steps in this direction in 1812. He reorganized land ownership and nationalized *waqf* lands that used to finance the schools and mosques and were the foundations of the power of the ulema. This step affected the traditional religious institutions, including mosques and the famous al-Azhar University (Moustafa 2000, 22).

The challenges posed by colonial subjugation and consequent social changes prompted two questions to the Muslim community: why has Islamic rule collapsed?

How to regain the "lost glory of Islam"? These questions privileged religion in general and particularly Islam as identifier and social demarcator of identity. These questions produced two diametrically opposite responses - often described as modernist and traditionalist - from the Muslim communities in regard to Islamic education; one called for reforms of the educational system, while the other insisted on further strengthening the extant education system by delving deep into tradition In Egypt, the call for and partial implementation of reforms by Muhammad Abduh (1849- 1905) and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (c. 1838- 1897), in India, the efforts of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), Sir Mohammad Iqbal (1877-1938) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849–1928) represent this trend. The Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College, founded in 1875 as Madrasatul Uloom Musalmanan-e-Hind, demonstrates that a segment of the reform movement insisted on a broader curriculum for upliftment of the community. In Indonesia, the modernization effort was initiated by several organizations, such as *Jami'at Khair*, *Al-Irsyad*, *Muhammadiyah*, to name but a few. (Azra 1996, 36). The "Sekolah Adabiyah" founded by Abdullah Ahmad in 1909 incorporated non-religious subjects along with *al-Qur'an*, *tafsir* and *hadith*, and became a model of Islamic institutions. One can, however, draw parallels between these institutions and educational reforms during the late-Ottoman period in Turkey (Fortna, 2002).

On the other hand, marginalized by state policies of secularization and challenged by the state-sponsored educational institutions, ulema found it necessary to establish, revive and/or maintain the madrassahs (or variants of it) as the primary institutions for the preservation and transmission of Islamic tradition. This placed the madrassahs in opposition to state-sponsored education and at variance with the hegemonic ideology of the colonial powers. Perhaps no other institution epitomizes this response better than the Deoband Madrassah, founded in 1866 in India. Also known as the Darul Uloom, the Deoband Madrassah was founded almost ten years after the historic rebellion against British colonialism. Maulana Muhammad Qasim Nanautawi (1833–1877) and Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi (1829–1905), two founders of the institution, reportedly participated in the rebellion and viewed this effort as their new means to counteract the debilitating effect of the colonial education system and uphold traditional Islamic education. Although the madrassah adopted a revised version of the Dars-i-Nizami curriculum, it was intended to continue the intellectual tradition of Shah Waliullah (1703-1762), and therefore emphasized *manqulat* (revealed knowledge) rather than *maqulat* (rational sciences)

in its curriculum; "fiqh formed the core of the curriculum" (Sikand 2005, 74). Whether Deobandi ulema were opposed to modern education, especially English, is a matter of debate, but what is beyond doubt is that they were not willing to compromise the integrity of what they considered "Islamic education." The objective of the Deobandis was the "correction of [the] defective state of Islam and Muslim life in India," but they insisted that it must begin with the revival of faith and piety (Reetz 2006, 83).

In addition to these two opposite efforts, some tried a middle path – reconciling religious with secular education, reforming the curriculum and pedagogy of madrassahs, uniting the Muslim community on the basis of common concerns, and raising awareness of Muslim identity. In Indonesia, the *Peasantry Manba'ul Ulum*, established in 1906 is a case in point. Its curriculum emphasized traditional-Islamic subjects such as al-Qur'an, hadith, *fiqh*, and added *mantiq*, *aljabar* and astronomy, elementary Latin letters and counting. In colonial India, the most significant effort was the establishment of an association of scholars—*Nadwatul Ulema* (the Council of the Ulema) in 1893 under the leadership of Maulana Muhammad Ali Mungari (1846–1927). But, the influence of the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama (in short Nadwa), established in 1896, was limited. The Indonesia experience, however, fared better than the Nadwa.

3.4 The Post-colonial Era

The demise of colonial rule and the emergence of many Muslim countries as independent nations since WWII, at one level, brought changes in the educational landscape in the Muslim world, while further strengthening the colonial policies of secularization, on the other. Generally speaking, in post-colonial situations schools were viewed as agents of development and modernization, and governments introduced centralized, secular, and homogenized systems of education with an emphasis on imparting skills to the students and reproducing the vision of a secular nationhood. The objectives of education include transforming the individuals who constitute the community and transmitting a particular interpretation of history and ideology. This policy is an integral part of the secularization of the society. Secularization, within this context, is what Moyser (1991) described as ideological secularization (when "the basic values and belief systems used to evaluate the political realm and to give it meaning cease to be couched in religious terms").

One of the significant, and perhaps most controversial, aspects of secularization is its emphasis on the presence of two contending spheres—private and public, and its placing of religion in the private sphere. Secularization, therefore, privatizes religion. In Muslim-majority societies, the privatization of religion undermines the Islamic scholarly tradition and consequently alienates Muslim communities. However, in the realm of education, these two contending spheres intersected, as the primary function of education is to preserve and transmit tradition—in this case, Islamic tradition as opposed to the secular tradition. This made education a critical battlefield. Here two contending visions face each other; they concern the identity of the community or nation and the future of the nation.

The modern state, in this instance postcolonial state, viewed education as a vertically organized system to transmit a unitary body of knowledge, as opposed to the idea of segmented and relatively autonomous sources of knowledge and life-wisdom, which the madrassah system represents. Faced with this situation, madrassahs further embraced traditional values and largely refused to reform their curricula and pedagogy, because any reform implies a departure from tradition, and a betrayal of the role history has bestowed on them. Therefore, in the postcolonial situation, the primary question for Islamic education was whether to embrace change through reforming the curriculum and pedagogy or to reinvent the past through maintenance of the status quo and transmission of Islamic knowledge.

Broadly, in postcolonial Muslim countries, three strands of the educational curriculum and consequently educational institutions emerged: the secular educational institutions, the religious educational institutions (e..g. *madrassahs*, *pondok*, *pesantrens*), and a combination of both. It is well to bear in mind that there are variations within each category. Some madrassahs continued to follow the *dars-i-Nizamiya*, others continued with the older version of the Deoband curriculum, and some embraced reforms (either started during the colonial era or after independence). The national ideology influenced the role of religious education and the status of the traditional madrassahs. Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, adopted a path, which incorporated religious subjects within secular education on the one hand while allowing the madrassahs (*pesantren* and *pondok*) to operate as private institutions. However, the governments remain deeply engaged with the Islamic education sector (for Islamic education in Malaysia see, Hamid 2010). The Pakistani education system incorporated many Islamic subjects within the mainstream education system while an independent strand of madrassahs continues

to exist and flourish. Significantly, these institutions follow sectarian lines and engage in domestic politics (Riaz 2008, 79-115, 190-208). Bangladesh, since its independence in 1971, has reformed and incorporated one strand of madrassah (*Aliya madrassahs*) in the national education system while another (*Qwami madrassahs*) following the traditional curriculum remain strong (Riaz 2008, 116-161, 208-218). India, the home of the Deoband madrassah, has witnessed an increase in madrassahs in recent years; some of which have received state support due to the adoption of the state prescribed curriculum while others have maintained autonomy to provide exclusive religious teaching. At the other end of the spectrum stands Turkey, which until the 1980s, excluded religious education from its mainstream education and since the 1950s has provided strictly limited availability of Islamic education through *Imam Hatips* schools.

Political activism was a significant characteristic of madrassahs in South Asia during the late colonial era, especially since the founding of the Deoband madrassah in the 19th century. But in the post-colonial era, Islamists (those who instrumentalize Islam as a political ideology) called for the reform of the traditional madrassahs and view Islamic education as the instrument of political change. Largely shaped by the teachings of Hasan al Banna (1906- 1949), Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) and Abul ala Maududi (1903-1979), Islamic education was viewed as an antidote to Westernization and the educational institution as a conduit for change. Maududi challenged the conventional ulema and their characterization of the madrassahs; in his view the extant madrassah system is not a 'system of religious education' (*dini talimi nizam*), instead it is the old system of education' (*qadim nizam-e talim*) which emerged in the medieval period to serve the contemporaneous administrative system. With the spirit of *ijtihad*, Moududi demanded the end of educational dualism – secular and Islamic – and called for an integrated educational system to realize the ideals of Islam. This development is important on two counts: it views Islamic education not as a mode of the preservation of heritage but as a response to current needs, not as a force for stability but for change; secondly, it is akin to the 'modernist' response to challenges to Islamic education during the colonial era but pursues Islamic education as the goal in opposition to the ideals of western secular education. The Jamaat-Islami (JI), founded by Moududi in 1941, has since worked toward establishing Islamic institutions which represent this line of thoughts. These institutions have increased considerably in recent decades and have become a distinct strand within the Pakistani educational landscape.

3.5 The Era of Islamization of Knowledge

Although the aspiration for the Islamization of knowledge, that is to view all knowledge from an Islamic worldview, is not new, the idea has taken on greater significance and attracted attention since early 1977, when the first Muslim education conference at Makkah was held. The conception of Islamization, as it is understood and articulated in recent decades, is broader and more comprehensive than any previous efforts and has larger implications. Niyozov and Memon summarize them as follows:

Islamization is not a minor filtering or gatekeeping conduit: it is a broad-based, diverse and evolving epistemological, ontological, and pedagogical strategy that aims to counteract not just Western and secular, but also any other non-Western, and in some cases, not-so-proper-Muslim encroaches into Muslim psyche and society. Islamization is an alternative paradigmatic endeavor: it is based on the premise that all knowledge can and need to be understood from within an Islamic worldview (Niyozov and Memon 2011, 14).

This new approach, protagonists claim, offers 'the Muslim *ummah* a vision as well as a methodology to confront the contemporary challenges and to reclaim Islam's lost civilizational glory' (Moten nd, 242-272, 248).

Two of the key proponents of this process were Malaysia-based Islamic scholar and educationist Sayyid Naquib al-Attas (1931-2006) and a US based Palestinian scholar Ismail Faruqui (1921-1986). The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) at Kuala Lumpur, founded in 1987, is at the forefront of this new paradigm shift, along with a host of other institutions that have emerged in the past three decades. These institutions include the international network of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) based in the United States, the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) in Pakistan, and a number of Islamic Universities affiliated with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) . This does not necessarily mean that the Islamization of education approach is free from internal contestations. Niyozov and Memon have identified two strands within the Islamization paradigm: one emphasizes the epistemological and ontological dimensions while the other stresses the ethical and pragmatic dimensions of knowledge.

The establishment of these Universities and institutions of higher learning have demonstrated that the educationists of Islamic countries have moved past the point of preoccupation with exclusive religious education of Qur'an, Hadith, and fiqh, that Islamic education has at least partially adapted to contemporaneous demands and that there is a recognition that new challenges require new *modus operandi*. But it is also well to bear in mind that the endeavor of Islamization of knowledge has not made serious headway since 1977 because of its normative inadequacies and lack of a clear actionable pathway of implementation. The conceptual drawbacks include essentialized thinking, rejectionist, exclusivist and self-isolating mindsets, superiority claims, and inability to constructively engage with Muslim and non-Muslim diversity (Niyozov and Memon 2011, 19-20). Although some publications and limited research studies on social sciences have been published by organizations with the goals of Islamization of knowledge, "no action plan has been devised either to reconstruct a fresh basis for Islamic thought and educational practice in the light of new discoveries and contemporary needs or to alleviate the dichotomy in Muslim thinking that has resulted from separating religious and secular knowledge" (Barazangi 1995, 406-411).

4. Conclusion

This brief survey of Islamic education since the sixth century shows that the defining feature of Islamic education has been adaptation. From its foundational era to the twenty-first century, Islamic education has expanded as Islamic civilization has spread and shrunk as western empires have colonized Muslim countries; and in the course of these changes, many Islamic scholars have tried to adapt to the contemporaneous circumstances. However, this endeavor has not been always successful with some scholars emphasizing transmission of heritage as the primary objective of education and insisting on using past texts and pedagogy. Both the diversity of its adherents and political contexts have influenced Islamic epistemology. Contestations and accommodations have contributed to the epistemology and theories of education, while what has remained a constant feature is the insistence on dichotomization of knowledge which has limited the scope and nature of Islamic education. In its golden age, between the 9th and 13th centuries, Islamic education not only embraced knowledge of earlier civilizations but also allowed debates and created a conducive environment for innovations. As blind following (*taqlid*) superseded *ijtihad* (creative reasoning), the promises of Islamic education have dimmed. Despite the call for a newer perspective, in the form of

Islamization of knowledge, there has been little development of a self-critical perspective and appreciation for ideas beyond the parameters of Islamic knowledge. These continue to remain the challenges of Islamic education in contemporary milieu and going forward.

Finally, one emerging issue within Islamic education which demands the attention of Islamic scholars and observers of education, in general, is Islamic education in the western world. Muslims do not only live in Muslim-majority countries or in countries where they are a significant minority; a significant number of Muslims now live as small minorities in countries in Europe and North America. These Muslim communities include those who were born in these countries and diaspora communities who have migrated from other countries. Within these larger multi-cultural environments, Muslims have founded various socio-religious organizations and established Islamic educational institutions, particularly for children. In some European countries, for example, Britain, these institutions receive modest state support, while in others they are shunned by the state and have remained limited in scope. This paper has not addressed this emerging trend, and the challenges Islamic education and Muslim communities face within these environments. The socio-economic, political and cultural contexts of these countries as well as the Muslim communities have shaped the nature and scope of these challenges. This aspect of Islamic education warrants close attention and demands incisive study.

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Endnotes

[1]. According to A. L. Tibawi, four centuries (seventh through tenth) of practice show that these majilsh were "for ahl al-ʿilm (tradition or religious sciences in general) or *ahl al-adab* (literature) or later ahl al-hikmah (philosophy), etc. according to the accomplishments and needs of teachers and pupils"; (Tibawi, 1962, 225–238. 226).

[2]. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, four of his companions, revered as the "rightly guided Caliphs" (al-Khulafa-ur-Rashidun), led the community. They were: Abu Bakr (632–634), Umar (634–644), Uthman (644–656), and Ali (656–661).

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