

Islamization: A framework for altruistic knowledge

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Abstract: Islamization of Knowledge provides a framework to obtain authentic and altruistic knowledge. It asserts that the nature of human existence and the external world can best be known and understood through foundational knowledge revealed by the Absolute Reality. Islamization of Knowledge operates along three broad principles: the identification of Absolute Reality, the linkage between truth and goodness and the balance between human aspiration and societal needs. It enables humans to identify the goals of life and the ways to achieve it. Humans objectify this subjectivity and consequently, construct social reality. Thus, the knowledge that humans develop with the help of revelation shapes the world of day- to-day activities and not the socio-cultural condition and the historicity of society.

Keywords: Social reality, plausibility structure, universalization of knowledge, truth & goodness, human aspirations & societal needs.

Introduction

Sociology of knowledge is based on the premise that knowledge is rooted in socio-cultural condition of a society. Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), the chief exponent of the discipline, explained in detail the “existential connectedness” of knowledge. Similarly, Max Scheler (1847–1928) uses the word “intimate linkage” and finds it in society and knowledge-guiding interests. He views that “the ‘form’ of mental process by means of which knowledge is acquired are always and necessarily codetermined sociologically, i.e. by the social structure” (Scheler, 1926: 55). Robert Merton (1910-2003) observes that the “Copernican revolution” indicated “that not only error or illusion or unauthenticated belief but also the discovery of truth was socially (historically) conditioned” (Merton, 1968: 513). The premise and the explanation of its exponents show that knowledge is indigenous, relative, and thus relevant only to the social condition where it is developed. This idea challenges the validity of knowledge because if it is not applicable to every condition, it is not authentic, correct and beneficial to humanity. A valid knowledge, as found in case of physical sciences, is applicable

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to all conditions, produces the same result and provides humanity with anticipated benefits. The question is whether one can attain authentic and beneficial knowledge of the social world. Mukherji (2004: 564) raised a similar question: “Is universality possible in social sciences?” This paper explains that it is possible if an adequate and authentic framework to acquire knowledge is developed. It further stresses that “Islamization of Knowledge” helps in finding an adequate framework to produce authentic and altruistic knowledge. It is based on revealed knowledge that is perfect and from that can be derived cardinal principles and plausibility structure to judge what is true and false, beneficial and harmful knowledge. “Islamization of Knowledge” identifies three factors that should be taken into consideration in the creation of knowledge. First is the identification of Absolute Reality, the Most Knowledgeable Being, Who knows all the secrets of the phenomenal world and the well being of His creation. The knowledge He conveyed is authentic, beneficial and applicable to all situations and to whole humanity. Second is the understanding of the linkage between truth and goodness. Everything that exists, and one finds, is not true; it should have quality of goodness. Third is to know and create a balance between human aspirations and societal needs. Knowledge should not only be in consonance with human aspirations, but should also be in tune with societal needs and serve the societal purpose

Sociological concept of knowledge

From a sociological perspective, knowledge, particularly of the social world is, by and large, “context dependent”, that is based on socio-cultural condition and historicity of a society (Mannheim, 1936; Max, Scheler 1926; Merton, 1968; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Stehr & Meja, 2005). This challenges and contradicts the very nature of knowledge because the concept of knowledge connotes that one has correct or true information of an object or situation. The knowledge of the social world based on the socio-cultural condition negates this idea as it differs from society to society due to the great variation in the socio-cultural condition of societies. Obviously, it gives the idea, and the proponents of the social context of knowledge presume that no knowledge (particularly of the social world) is perfect. They also think that all knowledge is relevant and genuine to the particular setting where it is developed and created because it is the outcome of the ethos of the group and supports the general will of the people. This presumption led Mannheim to develop the idea of relativism that he modified later as relationism. The fact is that the social world relates to how individuals make their survival

possible on earth; for what purpose and with what intensity; how they meet the requirements of their survival with what materials and resources; how they interact with others and establish relationships with them. All these are based and related to certain set and system of virtues that contain elements of righteousness and goodness that, according to the general principle, is one, universal, beneficial to humanity and cannot vary from group to group and society to society. These qualities are expressed in a comprehensive term, “truth” that contains actuality, benevolence and ecstasy. One of the doctrinal principle of Islam is “the unity of truth” that “holds that truth is a modality of God and is inseparable from Him, that truth is one just as God is one” (al- Faruqi, 1983: 10). From this perspective, genuine knowledge is one relating to the broad principles of leading life. We develop an alternative framework according to which we can create and develop knowledge applicable across spatial boundaries to whole humanity and for its best interest.

Humans should first apply all of their cognitive abilities to understand the nature and working of the external world as well as of their own existence and behavioural patterns particularly the set of actions of others. They should grasp information about the workings of the world, the way interaction goes on, social events that take place; thus, individuals are involved in social setting with particular purpose and means to achieve it. They further try to know the ideas about these facts prevalent in a society and the general opinion of the majority of the people. They should compare both types of information and identify the differences and their genesis. After that they should synthesize the whole information and draw conclusions.

The knowledge that develops on the basis of the synthesis of the information grasped by the mind-set and cognitive abilities of individuals as well as of societal view and opinion of the majority of the people is not correct and overall beneficial to humanity because the mind-set and societal view both have their own limitations. They are guided and influenced by human desire, aspirations of ego, bodily appetite and momentary pleasure. The said knowledge is required to be evaluated by the genuine and perfect criteria revealed by Allah (SWT), the Absolute Reality. The revelation, in fact, lays down certain cardinal principles that constitute “plausibility structure” on the basis of which we can evaluate the authenticity, creditability and utility of that knowledge for human beings. In case it corresponds with the plausibility structure, it is closer to reality and beneficial to humanity, otherwise it will be the other way round and not

genuine. The plausibility structure is derived from the revelation and, as such it is associated with the meaning of life and refers to the way of how to achieve it. It is thus, universal and applicable to all human beings just as the revelation is.

The plausibility structure occupies a high position in the life of individuals because they consider it a genuine and authentic way to live in this world. As a result, they try their best to mould their actions according to its framework and make social arrangement that facilitates such type of actions. Individual action and societal arrangement are based on certain goals towards which they are initiated and directed. The plausibility structure helps individuals and collectivity of individuals to identify the goals which they have to pursue throughout their lives and seek different mechanisms to achieve them. The different kinds of meanings that individuals and society develop and attach to their strategy, planning and structuring of activities get impetus from revelation and plausibility structure. The universe of meaning can emerge exclusively either by mind-set of individuals or by societal view but it cannot be genuine if it is not compatible with the meaning determined by the revelation. It may be influenced by the inherent weaknesses with which both factors, mind-set and societal view, suffer. Humans interested in developing and creating veritable knowledge of their existence and the external world have to take these factors into consideration, ponder over them and evaluate them by the cardinal principle laid down by revelation and then have to select meaning of life and of their entire operation in this world.

The prominent fact to ponder over is the role of revelation in providing humans with the bases of genuine knowledge. It determines the meaning, the broad purpose of life and human operation in this world as well as the way to achieve that purpose. Thus, the social phenomenon that comes into being, the individuals' involvement and participation in social setting, the bases of social activities as well as the trivial purposes behind other activities are all influenced and tinged with the broad purpose of life. In a nutshell, the social action which is one or the other is initiated and directed towards that goal. This constitutes the subjectivity of social phenomena without the knowledge of which it is not possible to comprehend and expose the real nature of the social world. The existing theories of knowledge neglect this aspect of social phenomena because they only concentrate on what appears. The crucial point is to understand how subjectivity is objectified and social world comes into being.

The social action, day to day activities or "realities of everyday life" are, in fact, none other than the objectification of subjectivity of life. They express human efforts to achieve the broad goal of life determined by the Absolute Reality

through revelation. These activities also indicate the force and intensity by which individuals work to achieve the goal. It depends upon humans; how they grasp the meaning, structure their mind-set, look to their existence as well as to the external world and develop knowledge. The present theoretical framework of knowledge demonstrates that the Absolute Reality has provided humans with foundational knowledge of their existence and the external world that activates their cognitive faculties to comprehend the workings of the world. This knowledge further structures humans' mind-set according to which they perceive the external world and its workings and develop knowledge. They also take into consideration the view of the world prevalent in the society in which they live, corroborate it with their own and synthesize the information acquired by both sources. The synthesis of the perception of the world and societal view of it develop the plausibility structure according to which they evaluate all sorts of information and perception of their existence and the phenomenal world and construct knowledge.

Islamization and universalization of knowledge

Islamization of Knowledge is an approach, a *modus operandi* to seek and search correct knowledge beneficial to humans and their societies. It is based on goodness and directly related to human life. It creates a genuine condition of human mind, liberating it from all sorts of containments: impact of desire, demands of ego, attachment to primordial group, culture and society so that it may understand truth and appreciate it. It impels the human mind to ponder over the bases, and the guiding principles revealed by the Absolute Reality and according to that look into and investigate the true nature of the phenomenal world. These ideas when taken into consideration provide clues and help us in developing an alternative framework for the acquisition of knowledge. This is a comprehensive and integrated framework that pays due attention to all factors that play some role in the acquisition of knowledge.

Islamization of Knowledge indicates that one has to comprehend the world, the purpose and pattern of its workings, human existence, and its perseverance in the world and develop knowledge in the true sense and correct perspective. In this context, there are four significant verities which one has to apprehend and mould actions and life accordingly. The first is the Absolute or Transcendental Reality, the most powerful, Who created the universe and things that lie in it, established a pattern and laid down certain principles according to which things work and operate. The second are human beings, the most superior and favourite creatures of the Absolute Reality Who bestowed upon them superior qualities, cognitive and others, and assigned a role for them to live and operate in

a distinct way in this world. The third is the world, an arena where humans have to operate in accordance with His commandments, perform the role of His vicegerents, demonstrate His suzerainty in every walk of life and establish cordial and meaningful relations with all objects, entities of the world and His other creatures. The fourth is the broad principles, set of rules that govern the workings of the universe, including human existence. The consciousness of these verities shapes human mind-set according to which humans perceive the world and develop knowledge. Islamization of Knowledge makes humans conscious of these verities and enables them to understand their importance in life.

Islamization of Knowledge can be used as a method to acquire knowledge of the external world. If one follows the process and the way Islamization of Knowledge operates, one will be able to develop knowledge in the correct perspective. There are three important principles along which it operates. The first is the identification of Absolute Reality and His commandments containing the cardinal principles that guide human actions and their operations in the world. This reveals that humans try their best to follow the commandments, apply those principles in the performance of different acts and create everyday activities. Thus, the day to day realities are not constructed by society or general view of the people but by the commandments of Allah (SWT). Islamization of Knowledge removes the fallacy that normative patterns of human action and life are determined by society or the general will of the people. Under Islamic doctrinal principle, it is not society that establishes norms, goodness and virtues but they are engendered by the Lord of the universe to be followed by humans to lead a virtuous life. Society is the result of the implementation of the Divine system of life. Similarly, social realities are the outcomes of human efforts to obey the will of the Lord and produce certain set of actions. Social action in the perspective of Islamization of Knowledge takes place in the course of human efforts in achieving the goal of life through Divine pattern.

The second principle indicates that social reality and social action exhibit the linkage between truth and goodness. It points out that the genuine and beneficial social action contains the elements of truth and goodness. Social reality, in fact, consists of a set of social actions; if it does not contain goodness it has devastating effects on humans and on society as a whole. Islamization of Knowledge asserts that everything that exists, and practiced by the people is not goodness unless it is in accordance with the cardinal principles revealed by Allah (SWT). In fact, goodness in a genuine sense is determined by Allah (SWT) Who is the epitome and source of truth and goodness. Goodness derived from Divine

Law is universally applicable and beneficial to all human beings and manifested in one or the other in social actions. Social actions devoid of genuine sense of goodness are distorted and cause humans to fall from the high pedestal of humanity.

The third principle refers to the social arrangement that maintains a balance between individual aspirations and societal needs. Generally, individuals want that their desires and aspirations to be given due consideration and placed in the construction and development of social arrangements. They want to enjoy maximum freedom and a society should not impose much restriction upon them which would be painful and require great efforts to follow. As society and social arrangements, according to them, are formed for their comfort and benefit, they should not suffer much by the restriction imposed by said society. The other aspect of the situation is that society imposes restrictions on individuals to refine their personalities and to produce such type of person who could maintain and continue its system. The situation becomes critical when a society is dominated by a section or group of people which wants that its socio-cultural traits to prevail over others and it would get more privileges as it is superior to others. Such group maneuvers the situation in such a way that it gets more privileges and consequently deprives others of their genuine share. This unnecessarily leads to turmoil, tension and conflict. An altruistic society based on cardinal principle takes both the situation into consideration and creates a reasonable balance between them. It neither gives much concession to individuals' aspirations nor imposes much restriction that damages individuals' personality. It takes care of all of its members, give them their desired shares and safeguard their interests.

Islamization of Knowledge stresses the need of constructing genuine knowledge based on and derived from the intellectual foundational framework revealed by Allah (SWT). For that, one has to comprehend the world and develop knowledge in the light of three principles. The knowledge one develops must be in accord with the cardinal principles revealed by Allah (SWT), the Most Supreme and the Most Knowledgeable being perfectly aware of all things apparent and hidden, known and unknown. Further, that knowledge should contain the elements of truth and goodness. It should expose and highlight the true nature and all aspects of a phenomenon projecting its complete picture so that it may be used for the betterment of society and its meaningful survival. Lastly, this knowledge should take a rational and balanced view of social phenomena; it should not give extra-ordinary emphasis either on human aspirations or societal needs but give importance to both of them in genuine and reasonable ways. The major thrust will

be on the overall well-being of humans and creation of such condition that will facilitate the attainment of the purpose of life.

Nature of social reality

Social reality in the present theoretical context is generally considered as a set of actions performed by individuals in a society or a social setting for a particular purpose. It constitutes in Berger and Luckmann's (1967) terminology "the world of everyday life". Humans have to perform different sets of actions to meet the requirements of their survival. They follow what people generally do or what society establishes and considers proper. The general principle is that society in view of its broad purpose of life develops an appropriate way to perform certain activities for meeting the requirements of its members' life. People, by and large, follow it and a general pattern of doing things emerges. Sometimes we find changes in it either towards betterment or deterioration due to the nature of individuals' compliance of the established pattern. The changes become the parts of the pattern when the majority of people exhibit them and society sanctions them. This is the reason that sociologists consider social reality as the product of society or general will of people.

Islam and the Muslims' situation are quite different. To understand it in the correct perspective, we have to comprehend the nature of society in Islam and the nature of social reality and its difference from social fact. Society, according to the doctrinal principle of Islam and its expression in concrete situation, is not a generating force. It comes into being to implement the broad principles of life revealed by the Creator for the well-being of individuals. It is a distinct arrangement of humans and principles to completely surrender to the will of the Lord of the universe and obey His commandments. It is created for the attainment of cardinal ideals, leading a virtuous and meaningful life. Thus, "the foundation of community in Islam is the principle which designates submission to the will of Allah, obedience to His law and commitment to His cause. In short an Islamic community is present only when it is nourished and fostered by Islam" (Abdalati, n.d.: 15). Sociologists generally observe that society or living together determines individual activities, social actions and pattern of social life. They assume that even religion is the product of society and treat it as a social phenomenon. Durkheim's (1912) theory of religion based on the study of the Auranta tribe exhibits the same trend and considers religion (totemism) as sacred activities expressing the ethos of the group. Islam negates this view, considers its system characterized as *Din*, as the product of Divine will and, as such its purpose,

principles, code of life, norms, concepts of good and bad, right and wrong are established by the Divine laws embodied in the *Shari'ah*. Society and social life are, in fact, the outcomes of the implementation of the Divine system or way of life. It comes into being to implement and follow the broad principles of life revealed by the Creator for the well-being of humans an example of which the world witnessed in the Madinan society. The advent of Islam in the region established a new society and structured the whole pattern of social life. Al 'Umri, (1992: 49) describes:

Since its appearance, this religion has brought about a radical transformation in the life of individual and of the society in that it completely alters the daily behavior and deep-seated habits of individuals, as it alters their standards, judgments, and outlook on the universe, life and man. Likewise, the structure of the society is visibly altered, some aspects disappear and new ones emerge.

He further explains:

In the daily behavior of the individual, Islam brought a radical change. What he was in pre-Islamic days is far removed from what he became later when he accepted Islam. The Arab is no longer unrestrained by laws in his social dealings and relationships. He has become disciplined by the restraining force of the *Shari'ah* in all aspects of his life, in moral behavior and habits, his sleeping and wakening, eating and drinking, marriage and divorce, buying and selling (Al 'Umri, 1992: 49-50).

These evidences show that day to day activities or what Burger and Luckmann (1967) call the "reality of everyday life" are determined and constructed by the ideals contained in the cardinal principles revealed by Allah (SWT), the highest authority. These principles shape the mind-set of individuals who comprehend the significance and purpose of their existence and try their best to mould it according to His commandments. Human actions and series of actions in social settings and out of those are initiated and carried out to seek the pleasure of the Lord. In a nutshell, the world of everyday life is divinely constructed and not socially constructed.

Social reality is considered actions generally performed by the majority of individuals to live and meet the requirements of their lives. This concept resembles the concept of social fact as explained by Durkheim (1938). Social fact is the product of collective consciousness that is outside the individual, develops a

force and thus constrains the individual's behaviour. It was very important for him "to know which facts are commonly called social" (Durkheim, 1938: 1). According to him, the things individuals do such as eating, sleeping, reasoning etc., cannot be called social fact as they are a set of individual acts and has no social character. Besides, there are other phenomena which are independent of individual facts, originating from different source and come under the category of social fact. He states:

When I fulfill my obligations as a brother or citizen, I perform duties which are defined externally to myself and my acts, in law and customs . . . I feel their reality objectively, for I did not create them (Durkheim, 1938: 1).

One of Durkheim's purposes of identifying "rules of sociological method" and explaining social fact, according to Morison, (1995: 151) was "to establish the existence of social realities outside the individual and to begin the investigation of these realities by scientific methods". Similar notion lies behind the concept of social reality as explained by Berger and Luckmann (1967). They assume that society has already established certain goals, normative patterns and ways of acting certain things. Individuals, when living with others and involving in social setting, follow the same pattern and mould their behaviour accordingly. It may be true for some persons and for certain age, particularly when they are infant but not those who think, ponder over their own existence, social situation and want to lead a meaningful life. It further shows that humans are passive agents and their minds have no set-up, perception and thinking of their own either of themselves or of external world; they absorb what is prevalent in society and what others say and practice. Besides, in cases when persons follow others and societal way of acting, they adopt and develop their own style because their orientation to the object and event is different. Sometimes, they are involved in the situation to a great extent and participate in it with great sincerity and devotion and use their own innovations, sometime they do things casually in a mechanical way.

In an Islamic perspective, there is a difference between social reality and social fact. Everything that exists in a society or every social act performed by the majority of people does not amount to social reality. They may be called social fact because according to the general criteria everything, act or event, relating to human interaction and social setting that exist, frequently fall under the category of social fact. It is not necessary that they may always be good and beneficial to humanity. Many customs, traditions and practices observed by the majority of the people in a society are detrimental, deleterious and shameful to humanity, but they

are prevalent and, according to Berger and Luckmann, may be considered social reality. Honour killing, human sacrifice to deity, denial of privileges and rights to depressed classes, lower status of women and homosexuality are such examples.

Social reality in Islam contains the elements of truth and goodness. According to Naquib al-Attas (2001: 1-2), it is not factual occurrence but the actualisation of something true. It is a comprehensive term includes all acts and patterns of social life, which are virtuous, dignified, righteous and full of wisdom and truth and of utmost benefit to humanity. This is the reason that it is called bliss (Nasr, 1981: 1). It purifies human consciousness, rectifies his acts, directs him towards the right path and leads him to attain the goal of life. It is structured by the Divine commandments, takes a distinct form, establishes suzerainty of Allah (SWT) and manifests it in every walk of human life and every facet of society.

The distinct feature of social reality in Islam is that it is not constructed and shaped by the socio-cultural condition of a society, but by the cardinal principles revealed by Allah (SWT). It is based on the sacred law derived from the commandment and known as *Shari'ah*. Everyone who identifies the sovereignty, authority and ascendancy of the Absolute Reality tries his best to surrender to His will, mould his actions and operation in the world according to His commandments and laws. If in any society, certain practices and ways of life are compatible to Islamic principles and Divine law, they are retained, otherwise they are rejected in case they are against and incompatible to that law. The world witnessed the advent of Islam in Arabia which changed all those practices of individuals, customs and social traditions that are harmful and injurious to humanity and against the suzerainty of the Absolute Reality, restructuring society and human life on the basis of cardinal principles, but retaining those which are in line with Divine guidance. "It is evident from history that Islam denied, rejected, modified and replaced the nomadic and pagan values, virtues, customs and ideals based on idolatrous traditions in pre-Islamic Arabia according to its needs" (Farooqui, 2005: 394).

Conclusion

From the observations made above, it may be concluded that the knowledge humans obtain through Islamization of Knowledge is universal and altruistic. It makes humans conscious of the cardinal principles that characterize the nature of human existence and the external world and enable them to operate. It further helps humans to identify the broad goal of life which they objectify and construct

social realities. Thus, social realities are constructed by divinely ordained principles and not by socio-cultural condition and historicity of society.

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