

## **Islamization of knowledge: Challenges and achievements**

Abdul Rashid Moten\*

**Abstract:** Islamization of knowledge, though began with the first revelation of the Qur'an, assumed the position of a movement in the 1980s. Since then, scholars have developed models to Islamize knowledge and new institutions have been developed to put these ideas into practice. Based upon documentary evidence and content analysis of the existing literature, this study analyzes the growth and development of this project and measures the achievements in the form of scholarly outputs and man-power development. It is found that the project did make some headway but it failed in many respects. The challenges faced by Muslims in their efforts to Islamize knowledge are numerous and requires concerted effort to make education really Islamic.

**Keywords:** Islamization of knowledge, duality in education, models of Islamization, Islamic universities, Islamized textbooks.

Islamization of Knowledge as a term was popularized by reformist intellectuals associated with the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Virginia, USA. It is the intellectual and epistemological aspect of Islam which began with the revelation of the Qur'an enjoining to read in the name of the Lord who created mankind and bestowed knowledge with the help of the pen (al-Qur'an, 96: 1-5). This and subsequent revelations brought, in the first instance, a vital change in the thinking, attitude and behavior of the people of Arabia resulting in the creation of a new civilization on spiritual foundation. Muslim scholars have ever since been concerned to bring man's intellectual efforts within the parameters of the Qur'anic teachings. The intellectual history of Islam may in fact be described as the history of Islamization of knowledge though it has not been generally noticed perhaps because the expression "Islamization of Knowledge" or its equivalent in Arabic and other languages has not been used in the literature. Towering scholars like al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn Sina (d. 1037), Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) and al-Razi (d. 1209) among others, followed the trend of recasting and reorientating knowledge along

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\* Dr. Abdul Rashid Moten is Professor, Department of Political Science, International Islamic University Malaysia. E-mail: rashidm@iiu.edu.my.

Islamic lines. They have been followed by others who struggled hard to make the words of the Lord supreme.

The initial enthusiasm and sense of commitment waned in later years. Subsequent generations of Muslims did not take knowledge acquisition and its cultivation seriously leading to stagnation in Muslim education. The colonisation of the Muslim land worsened the situation. The colonial rulers introduced changes in all systems of education and created secular-religious duality in the educational system. Intellectual dependency had taken root in the collective Muslim mentality and attitude. Muslims, in the words of al-Faruqi, “were double-crossed, colonized, and exploited, proselytized, forced or bribed into conversion to other faiths. They were secularized, Westernized, and de-Islamized by internal and external agents of their enemies” (al-Faruqi, 1982: 1). No major development took place during the post-independence era since Muslims were governed by the secularised elites educated in the West.

Concerned Muslim intellectuals did agitate to bring about a revolutionary transformation in the educational system. Initially, Muslim intellectuals like Rashid Rida (d. 1935), Sayyid Jamaluddin al-Afghani (d. 1897), Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) and others tried in vain to bring about “partial Islamization” (Sultan, 1997: 57). Muslim Scholars and activists like Muhammed Iqbal (d. 1938), Hassan al-Banna (assassinated 1949), and Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi (d. 1979) also made significant contributions towards comprehensive reform of education system along Islamic lines. Sayyid Mawdudi, in 1936, suggested: “to critically analyse the Western humanities and sciences and to bring them into line with the teachings of Islam” (Mawdudi, 1995: 17-18). However, the urge to restore a pure Islamic education system became a global issue in 1977 with the convening of the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The theme of the conference was "Basis for an Islamic Education System". This was followed by the first major International Conference on Islamization of knowledge held at Lugano, Switzerland in November 1977. It was convened by the Association of Muslim Social Scientists and attended by thirty leading Muslim intellectuals. In the convention,

[t]here was a general consensus about the need, fundamentally and comprehensively, to reform contemporary Islamic thought, to redefine the intellectual and academic basis for the Islamization of knowledge, and to establish a research institute to conduct research and provide a

platform for all Muslim intellectuals, scholars, and thinkers from all over the world (IIIT, 1988: x).

Participants agreed that the contemporary crises of the Ummah was intellectual, a crisis of thought, and the way forward is to develop a framework for Islamizing knowledge. One major outcome of the conference was the establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Herndon, Virginia, in 1981. This was followed by a second conference in Islamabad, Pakistan in 1982 and the publication of a book, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*. This was followed by conferences in Malaysia in 1984 and in Sudan in 1987.<sup>1</sup> This study provides an overview of the origin, development, achievements and challenges faced by Muslims in their efforts at Islamizing knowledge.

### **Models of Islamization of knowledge**

The conferences held in various places did alert Muslims to the need for the Islamization of Knowledge. Consequently, there have developed various models for the Islamization of Knowledge. In the forefront of model construction and popularization was Ismail Raji al-Faruqi who asked the Muslims: "How long are we going to content ourselves with the crumbs that the West is throwing at us?" Then, he argues that the West borrowed the heritage of "our forefathers ... and put it in a secular mould. Is it asking for too much that we take this knowledge and Islamize it?" (Quoted in Ba Yunus, 1988: 16).

To al Faruqi, "to recast knowledge as Islam relates to it, is to Islamize it" (al-Faruqi, 1982: 15). This means "... To redefine, and reorder the data, to rethink the reasoning and relating of the data, to reevaluate the conclusions, to re-project the goals and to do so in such a way as to make the disciplines enrich the vision and serve the cause of Islam" (al-Faruqi, 1982: 15). Al-Faruqi presented a 12-step

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<sup>1</sup> There were many other conferences but they were specifically geared towards Islamization of Education. The Mecca Conference in 1977 was followed by six other conferences on Muslim Education: Islamabad, Pakistan, in 1980 dealing with the preparation of integrated Islamic curricula; the Dhaka, Bangladesh, conference, in 1981 focusing on the preparation of textbooks for schools; the conference, in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 1982 dealing with the methods of teaching; the Cairo conference in Egypt in 1987 to review the achievements of previous conference; and the Sixth World Conference held at Cape Town, South Africa in September, 1996 to prepare lesson plans and teaching guidelines for schools. See Saqib (2000: 52-53).

work-plan as a guide for Muslim graduate students and professors interested in utilizing an Islamization of knowledge approach in their teaching and research projects.<sup>2</sup> In a nutshell, according to the Work Plan, the so-called modern disciplines and the Islamic legacy would be mastered, analysed and assessed before being synthesized and disseminated in the form of textbooks.

Syed Naquib al-Attas defined Islamization as “the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, national-cultural tradition, and then from secular control over his reason and his language” (al-Attas,1978: 41) It is in effect, “the deliverance of knowledge from its interpretations based on secular ideology and from meanings and expressions of the secular” (al-Attas, 1978: 43). He suggests two steps to Islamise contemporary knowledge: the isolation process and the infusion process. The idea is to free knowledge from the Western culture and civilization through isolation. This must be followed by infusing knowledge with Islamic elements.

Syed Hossain Nasr (1982; 1987) provides a philosophical position on modern science and technology. He argues that modern science is not the only legitimate science of the natural order, but is simply a science of nature which Islamic civilisation cannot simply emulate without destroying itself. He considers modern science to be a direct challenge to the Islamic worldview. He consequently urges Muslims to master modern sciences, to come up with a positive Islamic critique of modern science on the basis of the Islamic intellectual tradition, and to create an authentic contemporary Islamic science.

Islamization of Knowledge has also been looked upon by Taha Jabir al-Alwani as requiring the combination of “two readings” that of revelation and the natural universe. To him, it is a cultural and intellectual project to correct the Muslim mind. He puts forward what he calls discourses or steps to be followed in the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking. These steps include: 1. Articulating the Islamic Paradigm of Knowledge; 2. Developing Qur’anic Methodology; 3.

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<sup>2</sup> The 12 steps are: 1. Mastery of the modern disciplines. 2. Discipline survey. 3. Mastery of the Islamic legacy: Anthology. 4. Mastery of the Islamic legacy: The analysis. 5. Establishment of the specific relevance of Islam to the disciplines. 6. Critical assessment of the modern discipline: The state-of-the art. 7. Critical assessment of the Islamic legacy: The state-of-the art. 8. Survey of the ummah’s major problems. 9. Survey of the problems of humankind. 10. Creative analyses and syntheses. 11. Recasting the disciplines under the framework of Islam: The University textbook. 12. Dissemination of Islamized knowledge (al-Faruqi, 1982).

Methodology for Dealing with the Qur'an; 4. Methodology for Dealing with the Sunnah; 5. Reexamining the Islamic Heritage; and, 6. Dealing with the Western Intellectual Heritage (al-Alwani, 1995).

There are others who have contributed to the debate on Islamization of Knowledge including Abdul Hamid A. AbuSulayman (1989), Mohd Kamal Hassan (2013), Ibrahim Ragab (1995), Mona Abul Fadl (1988). These scholars have kept the debate on IOK alive and added new dimensions to it which deserve special study.

### **Institutions to implement the Islamization of knowledge**

The movement for IOK has resulted in the establishment of various think tanks and educational institutions. Foremost among the think-tanks is the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) which was established in 1981. The International Institute of Islamic Thought is dedicated to the revival and reform of Islamic thought and its methodology in order to enable the Ummah to deal effectively with present challenges, and contribute to the progress of human civilisation in ways that will give it a meaning and a direction derived from divine guidance. The realisation of such a position will help the Ummah regain its intellectual and cultural identity and re-affirm its presence as a dynamic civilisation. The Institute promotes academic research on the methodology and philosophy of various disciplines, and gives special emphasis to the development of Islamic scholarship in contemporary social sciences. The program, which has become known as "Islamization of Knowledge," endeavours to elucidate Islamic concepts that integrate Islamic revealed knowledge with human knowledge and revives Islamic ethical and moral knowledge, through education, teaching and support of scholarly research. IIIT aspires to conduct courses in order to promote its objective to reform Islamic thought, to bridge the intellectual divide between the Islamic tradition and Western civilisation. In its teaching and selection of teachers and courses, IIIT endeavours to promote moderation, inter-faith dialogue and good citizenship.

IIIT is headquartered in Herndon, Virginia (near Washington, DC), and has set up branch offices in Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belgium, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UK. These institutions are engaged in research and in-depth studies for getting rid of duality in education.

Equally noticeable is the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) which was established in 1987 by the International Islamic University Malaysia as an institution for postgraduate teaching and research. Till 2002, the institute was directed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas who champions "Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge." One of the major objectives of ISTAC is to "provide for graduate and post graduate studies and research with the objective of training scholars and intellectual leaders to play a creative role in the restoration of Islamic civilization to its rightful place in the modern world" (ISTAC, 1996: 9).

Indeed, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), from its very inception, looked upon education from an Islamic perspective. The university authorities strove hard to define the university's direction by formulating vision and mission statements. One of the mission statements is: "To promote the concept of Islamization of Human Knowledge in teaching, research, consultancy, dissemination of knowledge and the development of academic excellence in the University" (IIUM, n.d. 5 (iii): 4). The mission statements of the University are summarized in article 5(vii) of its Constitution as: Integration, Islamization, Internationalization, and Comprehensive Excellence (IIICE).

The teaching and research activities of the faculty have helped the IIUM achieve the status of a leading international academic and research institution imbued with Islamic values. There are many universities around the world, including the University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates that design their academic programmes taking the IIUM as a model. There are other universities which aim at Islamization of knowledge. Some of these universities include: the Islamic University Chittagong (IUC), Bangladesh, which started functioning in 1995 with its policy of "continued Islamization of academic curricula" and to inculcate the Islamic values about the life, nature and the universe; the Asian University of Bangladesh (AUB), established in 1996, which aims to "disseminate knowledge in an ethico-human approach...; and the Riphah International University, Islamabad (RIU), established in 2002, which aims to produce a new generation of professionals, researchers and leaders "with concern for the welfare of humanity" (Moten, 2009: 68-72).

There are several other universities that aim at Islamization of knowledge. These are, among others, International Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan, established in 1980 and reconstituted in 1985; the Islamic University of Niger, sponsored by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and established in

1986; and the Islamic University in Uganda, conceived at the second summit of OIC in 1974 and inaugurated in 1988. They all aim at Islamizing knowledge at higher education level and to promote research in various aspects of Islamic education.

### **Achievements of Islamization of knowledge**

Islamization of Knowledge movement has been moderately successful in achieving its aims and objectives. Since no research has yet been conducted to measure its success, it is but natural to look at few institutions and assess their performance by looking at the number of publications in various fields subsequent to the first world conference in 1977.

King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, has published the Islamic Education series and also published the proceedings of the world conferences in six volumes. However, it is the IIIT, U.S.A., which has the most publications in this field. It has been continually publishing, since 1984, a double blind peer-reviewed and interdisciplinary quarterly journal called the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (AJISS). The institute publishes ten different series in English language. These series are: Islamization of Knowledge, Issues in Contemporary Islamic Thought, Research Monographs, Occasional Papers, Human Resource Development, Perspectives on Islamic Thought, Islamic Methodology, Academic Dissertations, Supplementary Social Studies Teaching Units, Islamic Law and Jurisprudence. The institute's website contains a list of 124 books in English, and 226 books in Arabic languages. These are in addition to the books published in other languages.

Various branch offices of IIIT have also been involved in publishing books and articles along Islamic lines. The IIIT London office, established in 1987, oversees the production of English language titles as well as commissioning translations. It has produced an Occasional Paper Series as well as audio and CD versions of a selection of the latter. The London office is also involved in the organisation of over 100 conferences seminars and workshops, and management skills training programmes. The Nigeria office of the Institute publishes a journal called *Al-Ijtihad: The Journal of Islamization of Knowledge and Contemporary Issues*. It has also published the Nigerian edition of the several books published by the IIIT office in Washington. This is in addition to the six volumes of her Islamization of Knowledge series. Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT) came into being in 1989 for the harmonisation of acquired and revealed

knowledge. The BIIT publishes books and holds seminar, symposium, etc. on the Islamization of knowledge on a regular basis. It also publishes two journals: *Bangladesh Journal of Islamic Thought* and the *International Journal of Islamic Thoughts*. It has also taken a laudable step to produce university level textbooks and has translated into Benglai language some works of leading Muslim scholars.

The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC) has produced during 1993-2013, a total of 78 Masters and 59 Doctoral theses dealing with Islam-related subjects. Some of these theses contain translation of older manuscripts written in Arabic. ISTAC also publishes the ISI-indexed journal, *al-Shajarah*, publishing, since 1996, scholarly articles in the area of Islamic thought, civilisation, and science. In addition, it has published over 62 books on various aspects of Islamic thought and civilisation.

The IIUM till 2013 has produced a total of 2,393 Masters and 799 Ph.D. theses. These theses and dissertations do not deal directly with Islamization of knowledge; they are, however, related to Islam or approached the issue from an Islamic perspective. The University also publishes 13 journals one of which (*Al-Shajarah*) is indexed in ISI and SCOPUS, three (*Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature*; *Intellectual Discourse*; and *International Medical Journal Malaysia*) are indexed in SCOPUS data base. The academic output of the University is appreciable as the various faculties have produced competent graduates to advance the frontiers of knowledge. The IIUM Press, under the Research Management Centre (RMC), is the publishing arm of the University. RMC encourages faculty members to produce and publish scholarly works in English, Arabic, and Bahasa Malaysia. The IIUM Press, according to its website, has published “more than 200 books and 100 issues of various journals.”

The graduates of these universities are now manning various positions in their countries and are bringing about some changes in their societies. A survey conducted at IIUM found students from the Balkan states of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, and Albania influencing their parents when they visit their home countries during the university break. “The parents find that the changes that their sons and daughters bring from Malaysia are the true teachings of Islam. Here, students seem to have acted as a catalyst for change, especially in the society where Islam is separated from people’s daily lives” (Nik Hisham et. al., 2003: 99).

Islamization of Knowledge has also been attempted by various governments including Pakistan under General Zia al-Haq; Malaysia under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Turkey under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The three governments attempted with varying degree of success in bringing about changes in education, economy and social policies (Moten, 2015). The Islamization of education, in the case of Pakistan, involved mushrooming of religious schools with heavy emphasis on the traditional curricula. In the case of Malaysia and Turkey, this involved attempts to include modern subjects in religious schools, enfranchise students graduating from religious schools, and rewrite secular school textbooks to increase references to Islamic values. None, however, has embarked upon producing “Islamized” text books to be used in colleges and universities. Malaysia and Pakistan has established universities with this mission but with limited success.

### Challenges

It is possible to add many other instances where apparently Islamization has been well appreciated. Many think-tanks have sprung up for the purpose of Islamizing knowledge and many universities have been established for the implementation of decisions arrived at various conferences on Islamic education. Yet, the Islamization of Knowledge faces a number of challenges. First, there exists not a single university that can be identified as a model institution where the curriculum is significantly Islamized. This is despite the fact that the International Islamic University Malaysia has been emulated by some universities. Almost all the universities continue to rely upon Western textbooks in all the disciplines. One problem which persists in all the institutions is the dearth of Islamized textbooks. The production of Islamized textbooks has been the major thrust of al-Faruqi’s *Workplan*. Even the scholars attached to the IIIT came to this conclusion which gave birth to al-Alwani’s six discourses on Islamization and AbdulHamid AbuSulayman’s attempt at adjusting al-Faruqi’s *Workplan*.

Second, the non-availability of textbooks is compounded by the paucity of academic staff well-grounded in both Islamic and modern sciences. Most of the academic staff are well-disposed towards Islam but they are unable to talk about Islam with confidence. They are the products of the Western education system and remain secular in their behaviour and orientation. Most of them do not see any contradiction between secularism and Islam. One professor in a university claimed satisfaction to see some of his students praying five times a day to the exclusion of

other acts in their daily lives. To him, “urging students to pray five times is the most important aspect of Islamization of knowledge” (Interview with the author, August 12, 2013).

A third serious challenge is the lack of adequate financial provisions for successful implementation of the educational programmes. The universities in general and Islamization of knowledge in particular are suffering severely due to inadequate funds. Most of the universities depend upon the government budget to run the organisation. The universities are facing serious financial constraints and hence are incapable of fulfilling the new expectations that are being placed upon it. The funding agencies require the University leaders to emulate successful corporate CEOs, even though the universities are neither expected to earn a profit nor obligated to maximize returns to their “stock holders.” Knowledge has increasingly become a commodity to be sold in a competitive market by the universities to their “customers,” the students. The universities are required to “sell” their programmes, and compete and win over the “competitors.” The old ideals of welfare, community and a sense of obligation toward others are replaced by the rules of the market. A generous system of universal benefits, it is believed, is inefficient, inequitable, and likely to promote “welfare dependency.” The universities are required to pursue profit through selling the expertise of researchers and the results of research. Islamization of knowledge cannot thrive in a competitive market. Islamization of knowledge does not sell and the agencies providing funding cannot commercially exploit the research results.

A similar conclusion is reached by Nik Hisham and his colleagues in their study specifically focused on the IIUM. They found the “war on terror” declared by the U.S. and its allies deter many Muslims from pursuing Islam related courses and joining institutions like IIUM. The respondents, in their survey, also pointed out many local problems hindering Islamization of knowledge including the government’s “emphasis on science and technology, quality assurance systems, and the ranking of universities... Many people, both in the government and outside, are now focusing on the marketability of courses offered by the universities.” Islam related programs offered in IIUM are by their nature “not directly marketable” (Nik Hisham et.al., 2003: 105). Consequently, students are shying away from Islam-related courses and are veering towards education, science, communication and other professional disciplines.

## Conclusion

The Islamization of knowledge movement unleashed by various world conferences on Islamization and Muslim Education and that of the international conferences on Islamization of knowledge since the 1970s did bear fruit and scholars have offered various plans to realize the aim of Islamization. Some of these scholars are also activists who established or encouraged the establishment of various think-tanks and educational institutions for the purpose of implementing the blueprints and recommendations of the conferences relating to Islamization of knowledge. These institutions, in turn, have influenced the growth of educational institutions in several countries.

The institutions have produced significant number of books and journals publishing materials relating to Islam and Muslim societies. These journals act as medium for scholarly dialogue and communication on issues related to Islam and the Muslim world. The universities have been producing graduates in thousands and the theses and dissertations they produced are somehow related to Islam. Also, appreciable steps have been taken by governments of several countries to Islamize their governance by introducing changes in the school and university curricula and also by attempting to make their economies and social systems shari'ah compliant.

Concerned Muslims are, however, not satisfied with the progress of the movement for Islamization of knowledge. There exists not a single model Islamic university that can be emulated by others. In the absence of Islamized textbooks, teachers rely upon Western texts in almost all disciplines. University teachers are not well-versed in Islamic knowledge and hence are unable to bring about changes in the curricula. Most of the faculty staff are Western trained and are secular. They are happy with simply performing the essentials of religion. The internal and external environments are equally hostile to the pursuance of Islamization of knowledge. There is a need for greater degree of commitment, and perseverance on the part of Muslims to infuse knowledge with spiritual insights revealed to mankind and the moral orientation designed to make Allah (SWT)'s words reign supreme. Indeed, Allah (SWT) is Exalted in might and wise (al-Qur'an, 9: 40).

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