

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Internal political and social movements of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries neglected Islamic education within the Muslim world and allowed external secular and missionary ideas to turn it into "religious" education. Variations in worldview and interpretation of Qur'anic principles of education resulted in emphasis on form over essence in educating Muslims.

Historical accounts of Islamic/Muslim education provide a variety of perspectives on its nature and the function of its traditional institutions. Cultural and political restraints ended Islamic education as a functional system aimed at understanding and appropriating Qur'anic pedagogical principles and limited it to "religious" knowledge confined to selected males. Islamic education has recently been confused with a subject matter, "religion," or a moral, social codes, akhlaq. The primacy of formalized and juridical education over the informal development of Islamic character resulted in curricular and instructional differentiation between class and gender, a separation of "Islamic" and "non-Islamic" knowledge, and a dichotomy between ideal and practice in Muslim education.

Islamic Education and Religious Education

Islamic education--the process of shaping character within the Islamic worldview (Qur'an 3:110)--requires the Muslim family to expose its children and adults to all knowledge as a means of understanding the parameters set in the Qur'an for a

constructive relationship with God, other humans, and nature. Based on the Qur'anic dictum, "Read in the name of the Creator...who taught human by the pen" (96:1-4)-- meaning that to read is to learn and to act as guided by the Book--Islamic education evolved from comprehensive training in the first Islamic community in Medina (ca. 623) to a course of study on religion or its inculcation in social mores. What is called "religious education" or "Muslim education" does not reflect the historical process of educating in Islam. This process, in Waqar Husaini's (in al-Faruqi and Naseeef, 1981) estimate, began to disintegrate from the end of the eleventh century, when science, the humanities, and social sciences were excluded from the curricula. Fazlur Rahman (1982) suggests that it remained functional into the fifteenth century, whereas Dale Eickelman (1985) asserts that it socialized Muslims well into the latter half of the twentieth century.*

Religious education differs from Islamic education even though it maintains remnants of the Islamic educational institutions. By separating "revealed" and "human" knowledge, it transformed Qur'anic principles into formalized legal and moral codes and rituals and created a dichotomy in Islamic thinking. It also transformed the meaning of the Prophetic dictum "Faqihu fi al-din" (Sahih Muslim) from teaching within the Islamic worldview to teaching Islam as interpreted by the different fiqh (jurisprudence) schools.

The salient features of Islamic education, such as tahfiz (oral/aural transmission), are often confused with talqin (the acquisition and dissemination of Qur'anic principles and spirit) that, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1982) asserts, led this field to produce "philosopher-scientists" in various intellectual disciplines. Islamic education's intimate relation to the Qur'anic revelation and hadith (Prophetic tradition) does not make it purely religious, nor does it render its other elements exclusively Islamic or absolute. Earlier Muslim intellectuals transformed the form, content, and intent of sciences,

education, and arts into Islamic disciplines by integrating intellectual and cultural development within the Islamic worldview. Most contemporary Muslim educators assume Islamic education to be religious indoctrination.

The traditional recitation method of teaching the Qur'an comes to mind when one thinks about Islamic education, but neither was ever restricted to this method and Islamic education is not limited to the study of the Qur'an. The Qur'an as the foundation of all knowledge guides behavior.

Islamic education has been decentralized and its practice has varied. It was reduced to religious education in different regions at different times. This transformation occurred when Islamic philosophy and pedagogy were separated and when strict public moral codes were imposed on females, rendering their public appearance taboo. Concurrently, generations of male religious leaders or jurists emphasized Qur'an as either an absolute moral code or a legal law instead of a universal guide for the whole of the community. The principles of Islamic philosophy were idealized and knowledge was classified by sources and by methods that enhanced the discrepancy between goals and means and the dichotomy between teaching males and females and moral (religious/private/informal) and rational (juridical/public/formal).

Separation of Philosophy and Pedagogy

Nasr criticizes Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) and other "modernist" Islamists for understanding "Greek philosophy through the eyes of its modern Western interpreters" and, hence, separating Islam from philosophy. Fazlur Rahman (Islamic "Modernism" in the Encyclopedia of Religion, New York, 1987: 318-22) describes Iqbal's accusing "the West of cheating humanity of its basic values with the glittering mirage of its technology" and his strong critique of world Muslim society. For Rahman, Iqbal was a

"neofundamentalist" who was reacting to modernism but also "importantly influenced by modernism." Iqbal's (1962) own assertion that the Qur'an is a book that emphasizes 'deed' rather than 'idea' is significant to the understanding of the Islamic educational process and its transformation.

To educate in Islam, Iqbal states, means to create a living experience on which religious faith ultimately rests. For Rahman (1982), it means Islamic intellectualism. Though Nasr believes that the Islamic theory of education can be reconstructed within the Qur'anic philosophy Iqbal emphasizes that the birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect, wherein "to achieve full self-consciousness, Man must finally be thrown back on his own resources."

These diverse views suggest that Muslims, particularly in the past two centuries, not only neglected philosophy, as Nasr suggests, but, as Isma^{il} R. al-Faruqi (1981) points out, also lost Islam's connection to its pedagogical function and its methods of observation and experimentation. As centers of higher religious learning began formally to transmit "book knowledge" and inculcation with particular interpretations, a dichotomy arose between philosophy or the ideal and pedagogy or the practice. Encouraged by skepticism in modern Western philosophy, this dichotomy was widened.

Western-educated Muslim modernists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not aware that the underlying philosophy of Western education differed from that of Islam, were satisfied with teaching courses on religion in the traditional style, while neglecting to restructure the traditional system. Meanwhile, "traditionalists" emphasized the primacy of Islamic doctrine over falsafah (philosophy), creating, in Husaini's words, a schism between them and the modernists and destroying the integrated educational system. Western-educated who reaffirm the validity of traditional practices--I call "Neotraditionalists"--interpret the philosophy of Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) as the "finally established" Islamic educational theory (Syed Ali Ashraf, 1985), and hold an absolutist perspective of Islamic education. This perspective, discussed elsewhere by

this author (1990 and 1991), results, unknowingly, in a dichotomy between the Islamic worldview and its pedagogical process.

Perspective on Islamic Education and its Institutions

Diverse perspectives of Islamic/Muslim education also result in diverse and at times contradictory accounts of its transformation. Kuttab (for primary and Qur'anic education) and madrasah (for secondary and higher learning) are the most frequent contexts in which Islamic education is discussed. Other institutions, such as the halaqah (study circle in a mosque), dar al-kutub (library/bookshop) and private homes play important roles but are rarely recognized, as Munir D. Ahmad ("Muslim Education Prior to the Establishment of Madrasah," Islamic Studies [Islamabad], 26:4, 1987: 321-48) and Salah Hussein Al-Abidi ("The Mosque: Adult Education and Uninterrupted Learning," al-Islam al-Yawm [Islam Today--al-Rabat], 7:7, 1989: 68-77) indicate, particularly in rural areas that constitute more than 70 percent of the Muslim world and where they might be the only educational institution.

No systematic study of the evolution of the educational process in these institutions has been done. There are scattered reports in biographies, books of history and Islamic thought, and encyclopedias, but they typically leave a gap between Ibn Khaldun's (1332-1406) Muqaddimah and the nineteenth-century sources in which Western perspectives dominate. Recent accounts of Islamic education are almost always presented in the contexts of modernization or Muslim revival movements that, Nasr (1987)^{*} asserts, Western scholarship overemphasizes even though they weakened traditional Islam. Fazlur Rahman (1987) was more concerned that these "reformers" integrated science and technology with the "Qur'anic requirement that man studies the universe" than with the transformation from Islamic education into religious education.

Teaching reading and writing in kuttab, according to Ahmad Shalaby (1979), preceded the rise of Islam, but existed on a limited scale. In distinguishing this type from

Qur'anic kuttab, Shalaby notes that several authors have confused the different varieties of this institution and cites Philip Hitti (The Arabs: A Short History, Chicago, 1956), Ahmad Amin (Dhuha al-Islam, Cairo, 1941), and Igné Goldziher. He states that Goldziher ("Education [Muslim]" in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, 1960, Vol. 5: 199-207), in his attempt to trace Qur'anic kuttab back to the early time of Islam, did not separate the varieties of kuttab. That Shalaby's account differs from Goldziher's on other matters related to teaching young Muslims suggests differences not only in their perspectives of Islamic education and its institutions but of the problems it has encountered. Though Goldziher relies largely on the same primary sources used by Shalaby, when he says that "modern movements towards reform" (p. 206) were unaffected by Western influence, he does not seem to distinguish between the Islam taught in kuttabs and madrasahs and that taught by informal socialization. Thus, he states, "the instruction of the young proceeded mainly on the lines laid down in the older theological writings," suggesting that the problem lies in Muslims' inability to adopt modern technologies. This assessment prevents him from realizing why 'religious' content constituted the central curriculum, and in some localities was the only function left for the kuttab, when government schools--the Ottomans' Rushdiyya schools--took over the teaching of reading, writing, and other subjects, or why natives resisted modernity (Akbar S. Ahmed, 1988) and gave up even Qur'anic schools in response to colonial policies (G. W. Leitner, "Indigenous Oriental Education, with Special Reference to India, and, in Particular, to the Panjab," Asiatic Quarterly Review. 2nd Series, 8, nos. 15 & 16, 1894: 421-38) and to exploitation of Islam by both colonial and local governments (Harrison, 1990). Similarly, when Rahman (1982) reports on educational reform in the nineteenth century, he confuses the varieties of kuttabs and their relationship to the madrasah, stating that in general, primary education (given in the

maktabs or kuttabs) was a self-contained unit that did not feed into the higher educational system. Rahman thus contradicts reports by Mohammad Akhlaq Ahmad (1985) and others that kuttabs and mosques played an important role for those continuing their Islamic higher education.

Contradictory accounts also surround the madrasah. Shalaby gives a detailed account of the first established madrasah in the eleventh century by Nizam al-Mulk in Baghdad and classifies these schools by location, founders and their positions, and the primary sources that cite them. A. L. Tibawi ("Origin and Character of Al-Madrasah," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 25, 2, 1962: 225-38) concurs with primary Muslim sources such as Ibn Khaldun's in concluding that the main characteristics of this institution may vary by region and time, but all are formal residential institutes of secondary and higher learning, with Arabic as the basic medium of instruction. They rely mainly on oral and aural dialogue between teacher and disciples. Their curricula consist, in addition to Qur'anic talqin and Arabic grammar, of tafsir (exegesis), fiqh (jurisprudence), hadith, usul al-fiqh (principles of jurisprudence), usul al-hadith (principles of narration), and biography of the Prophet and al-Sahabah (the Prophet companions). Classical sciences (astronomy, geography, and medicine) and Arabic adab (literature) were also taught, their intensity and depth depending on students' mastery of particular subjects and teachers' strengths. M. A. Ahmad (1985) and other Muslim authors suggest that a similar though less vital educational process still exists in such institutions. Goldziher, however, does not recognize that what he describes as a "primitive and patriarchal form of instruction still hold [ing] its place" in these institutions is a result of the takeover by technical and military high schools, in which only Islamic subjects were left to traditionally trained teachers.

In response to colonial policies, these institutions took on one of three forms: traditional, private-sponsored religious with some Western orientation, and government-sponsored secular with added religion courses. The 'traditional' form is represented in the remnants of kuttab and madrasah. Famous among them are Deobond in India, al-Nidhamiyah in Iran, al-Mustansiriyah in Baghdad, al-Sulaymaniyah in Istanbul, al-Nuriyyah in Damascus, al-Azhar in Cairo, al-Qayrawan in Tunis, al-Qurawyun in Fez, and Cordova in Spain. Some of these institutions, such as Al-Azhar and Deobond, still grant 'Islamic' higher degrees but are weakened because they consider religious knowledge separate from other knowledge.

When modernist elites of the early twentieth century sought reform from outside their society, they created private religious schools (e.g, Yadigar-i Hurriyet established in 1908 in Basrah city of Iraq). Their indiscriminate adoption of Western systems, combined with nationalistic and politicized Islam, emphasized a secular morality in teaching natural and social sciences that gradually separated Islam from its Qur'anic base, favoring secondary literary and historical sources of religion.

When the mid-twentieth-century "revivalists" assumed the preservation of Islamic principles by teaching ibadat (rituals) and moral codes, courses on religion (al-daynah) were added in the secular government-sponsored system, taking a secondary place in the curriculum. At present, these courses range in their proportion to the overall teaching time from 32 percent in Saudi elementary schools to 3 percent in Syrian high schools, and their content varies from a watered-down version of tafsir, figh, hadith, and Islamic history to hifz (memorization of Qur'an) and rituals. In addition, very few secular universities in the Muslim world offer any such courses on Islam.

Curricular and Instructional Differentiation

The imposition of strict public moral codes on females is another indicator of the transformation of Islamic education into religious education, when women were prohibited from institutions such as madrasahs and mosques, even though women were formally and informally transmitting the culture to their offspring as well as to other children, males and females, inside and outside the homes in early and Medieval Muslim communities (Goldziher). Muslim boys and girls were taught at home and attended formal kuttab and, according to Nasr (1987), girls even studied in madrasahs when it was first established. No historical accounts mention females as [♀]Alimahs (Islamic scholars), knowledgeable in branches of Qur'anic sciences such as tafsir, kalam (Islamic philosophy/theology), and fiqh, particularly after the formalized higher learning in madrasah, although Shalaby reported that many females had established or endowed such institutions. Also, many primary Muslim sources (such as al-Suyuti [d.1505] and others listed by Goldziher, Nasr, and Shalaby) report that up to the fifteenth century there were outstanding women who memorized and narrated hadith to earn them the title of Muhaddithat (female narrators) among their disciples, and some who were well-known in Sufi orders

The assaults on Islamic culture by European crusaders, orientalist, and colonial governments, combined with their differentiation of private vs. public domains, caused Muslim leaders to lose sight of the essence of Islamic education, particularly its informal sector, and to take extreme attitudes at the expense of a revival of traditional Islam. These predominantly male leaders, beginning with the eighteenth-century Wahhabis puritan movement, propagated the view that women's primary concern is their home and thus they need a different type of education. "Reformists" such as

Muhammad [♀]Abdu (1845-1905) emphasized Islamic ideals concerning women's higher status in Islam and the obligation of both

males and females to seek knowledge; yet in practice, they did not recognize women's access to a thorough knowledge of the Qur'an as a key to intellectual development.

Revivalists, such as Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) and Abul ^QAla al-Maududi (1903- 1979), though attempting to restore Islamic education in post-World War II nation-states, used the traditional rationale about women's education and asserted that their "natural" disposition is to transmit culture to the next generation (both boys and girls). Yet they did not restructure the traditional practices of teaching Islam to allow for this transmission. The primary objectives of women's education in Muhammad Qutb's (1961 and 1981) curriculum were to prepare them for the biological and emotional roles of mothers and housewives. Such objectives further confused and marginalized women's education in Islam.

The post-1969 "Islamization" movements leaned toward politicized Islam but created another meaning of Islamic/religious education for women. Contrary to their intellectual base that culminated in Isma^Qil al Faruqi's (1921-1986) Islamization of Knowledge (1982), proponents of these movements emphasized morality, which overshadowed their presumed goal--restructuring the secular system of higher learning to address religious and cultural needs of Muslim societies as part of newly adopted development strategies. The Indonesian and Malay development policies of involving all segments of the population in education and training, reported in Sharom Ahmat and Sharon Siddique (1987), seem to be a first step toward recognizing women's role in social development. Emphasis on morality, however, particularly when women became part of the Malay Madrasahs (an outgrowth of the Podock religious training with worldly affairs in sight) of the 1960s and the Dakwa (call for Islamic orientation) of the 1970s and 1980s, led religious education to take the form of moral dogma. The Indonesian Pesentran system (established in rural areas in the early nineteenth century and spread to urban development in the 1970s and 1980s), maintained an integrated system, and Indonesian women, unlike those in any other Muslim country, occupy a full range of religious leadership roles.

Neotraditionalists, like Anis Ahmad (1984), attempted to "liberate Islam from Western cultural colonialism" in the 1980s, giving women's education the form I call "reversed feminism," emphasizing segregated education for different but unequal roles. This trend is flourishing in North American and West European countries, where Muslim males are demanding single-sex schools and, in their private "Islamic/Muslim" schools, are segregating children beginning with first grade. Curricula in these schools are the same as in public schools with courses on religion and Arabic language.

The Dichotomy of Ideals and Practice

The Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC) established in 1973 held five world conferences on Muslim education in Mecca 1977, Islamabad 1980, Dacca 1981, Jakarta 1982, and Cairo 1987. Their recommendations, Ashraf reports, were to "re-classify knowledge into 'revealed' (given to man by God and contained mainly in the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet) and 'acquired' (by man's efforts)," and that "acquired" knowledge should be taught from the "Islamic point of view," the process of which is referred to as "Islamization of knowledge." The goals, similar to those outlined by al-Faruqi (1982)--to integrate modern sciences and branches of knowledge within the Islamic philosophy--are stated in the Islamic Education Series' seven monographs of which Ashraf is general editor.

A core curriculum (Muhammad Hamid al-Afendi and Nabi Ahmed Baloch, 1980) with Syed Muhammad al-Naqib al-Attas's (ed.) Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education (Jeddah, 1979) and other "blueprints" for groundwork and strategies were published in this series, the basic premise of which is that the only way to develop an Islamic curriculum that will alleviate the crisis in Muslim education caused by the dual traditional and secular systems, is to "reinterpret all branches of knowledge, particularly social

sciences, within the Islamic perspective." Yet, because the emphasis was on "revealed" vs. "human-acquired" knowledge, no action plan was devised to reconstruct a fresh base for Islamic thought and educational practice in the light of new discoveries and contemporary needs or to alleviate the dichotomy in Muslim thinking that resulted from separating "religious" and "secular" knowledge. Also, despite its urgency in light of new economic developments and the women's emancipation movement, no action plan was chartered for women's education. Instead, the emphasis on different and segregated education resulted only in prescriptive statements, reiterating a perspective on girls' education that has been evolving since the introduction of Western secular education practices (although one of the fourteen committees of the World Conferences on Islamic Education was charged with the "teaching of women," no female educator was involved, and the topic was discussed in less than five pages of the seven volumes.

This perspective of female education in Islam is almost uniform in countries that adopted segregated education after encountering European and American systems. In the Indian subcontinent, for example, most females attending Qur'anic kuttab not only are denied the opportunity to continue their religious education once they reach puberty but rarely are instructed by their families, as was the practice among learned Muslim families before the British colonization. Similar practice is found in other Muslim countries after interacting with Western educational practices, at which the emphasis is placed on wanting girls to maintain religious knowledge and character in sexually segregated schools (El-Sanabary, 1973) while allowing no female teachers' education in religion. Despite their enrollment in kuttabs at prior eras, Saudi girls, as an example, were not allowed to enroll in religious institutions of higher learning such as 'Um al-Qura in Mecca until 1970-71, when, according to Mohammed Saad al-Salem "The Interplay of Tradition and Modernity: A Field Study of Saudi Policy and Educational Development,"

(Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1981), only 80 girls versus 2,210 males were admitted. Thus, these girls and young mothers receive their religious knowledge mainly by observing their elders' practice of local, regional tribal, or ethnic customary interpretations of Islam, and those who attend public and

private schools receive secular knowledge from trained, organized teachers with structured curricula.

In summary, Muslim male educators continue to overlook the dynamics of the role of women as the transmitters, preservers, and transformers of the culture in Muslim societies into the 1980s and 1990s. These educators kept female religious education peripheral, relegating it to the home. Such a discrepancy in female education is only one of many other disparities that transformed Islamic education, resulting in fragmented educational planning and imbalanced emphasis between religious and secular objectives. This imbalance is mostly the remnant of the colonial and missionary legacies that left the Muslim world in a turmoil even after independence.

* See the author's article "Educational Reform" and its Bibliography.

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