

Revitalizing the integrated knowledge: Said Nursi's educational model

Muddasir Ahmad Dass*

Abstract: Today the Muslim world is facing the intellectual crises; the crises in knowledge and education which has put the Muslims on the lowest rung of the ladder of nations. Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries witnessed many Muslim educational reformers who worked very hard to reform the education system prevailing among Muslim nations and in spite of such hard-works, they couldn't succeed in working out of an effective educational system which could overcome the intellectual crises of Muslims. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, a social and religious reformer in the contemporary times gave an educational model for solving the educational and intellectual crises in the Muslim world. He gave the concept of integration of knowledge in which he suggested that modern sciences should be taught in the Madrasas and religious subjects should be taught in the secular or modern schools. The paper aims at studying the 'integration of knowledge' concept given by Said Nursi and aims at finding the possibilities and opportunities of applying the Nursian model of education based on the integration of modern knowledge and religious knowledge in contemporary times. The paper concludes that the contemporary Muslim world needs such an educational system which combines both types of knowledge (modern-western and Islamic), which will help in regaining the Muslim intellectualism.

Key words: *education, integrated knowledge, Western education, faith based education*

Introduction

The Nursi's educational thoughts can be discussed in solving various educational problems and challenges posed by the western society to the Muslim world. Said Nursi, born in Eastern Turkey in 1877 and died in 1960 at the age of 83, was a scholar of high caliber who mastered himself both in traditional and modern knowledge. His magnificent work 'Risale-I Nur' explains Muslim belief and the truths of the *Qur'an* to the modern man. He explained and elaborated his

*Lecturer in Islamic Studies at Govt. Degree College Bijbehara, Jammu and Kashmir, India; *mudasirdas@gmail.com*

arguments and ideas on the basis of logic and reason, by giving examples and illustrations related to the existence of man and universe (Nursi, 2015). Said Nursi, known as Bediuzzaman (wonder of the age), was living at a time when most of the Muslim nations were colonized by the western powers, and the western world dominated the Muslim world in every sphere of life including the education system. Due to this western dominance in education, Muslim institutes reluctantly adopted the western educational system, which according to Muslim scholars is devoid of religious beliefs and human values (Nadvi, 2013). Due to the colonization and adaptation of western education system, western cultural dominance prevailed in the whole Muslim world which affected the Muslim intelligentsia gravely, resulted in the disintegration of the Muslim world at political and intellectual level. By the influence of the western knowledge and education system, Muslim intellectuals/‘ulāmā got divided into two groups. One group was the group of traditionalists who favoured the traditional knowledge, that is the knowledge of *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* and its related branches like *tafsīr*, *fiqh* etc. and neglected the role of modern knowledge. They criticized the western knowledge as this knowledge is devoid of faith, but failed to provide the rational support through intellectual arguments (Nasr, 1998). Traditional ‘ulāmā failed to understand the methodology which their ancestors had adopted, who (the Muslim scholars and scientists of medieval period) had critically examined the Greco-Hellenistic, Persian and Indian sciences before incorporating it in the Muslim scientific knowledge. They considered the western/modern knowledge as the major enemy of Islam without the solid arguments. They were of the view that modern/western knowledge is devoid of religious beliefs and incorporating this western knowledge with the Islamic knowledge will lead to skepticism. The traditional Muslim scholars, therefore, preserved the faith against many of the onslaughts of western thought, but were not able to provide a critical examination of modern sciences on the basis of Islamic criteria (Nasr, 1998). The second group was favouring the modern knowledge or western knowledge and considered that the Muslim progress can be attained only through

modern western knowledge and totally neglected the religious or traditional education. Some Muslim scholars like Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī considered the western knowledge neutral and favoured both types of knowledge essential for Muslims. Muslim scholars think that modern science in the west was the expansion of the science which Muslims had developed from the 8th century to the 14th century, which was transmitted to European world to a large extent through Spain and Sicily. All the knowledge forms whether scientific or religious come from Almighty Allah, whose acquisition leads to success in this world and hereafter but the science in the west has caused chaos and disorder which was the fault of Christianity and not of this science. If the Muslims start to study the science in the same way as their ancestor's studied, they would be able to develop it further without any of the negative effects and will help in regaining the spirituality and morality, which the modern world has lost by the spread of secularism (Nasr, 1998).

By these differences of viewing the western knowledge, Muslim intellectual groups with opposite ideologies came into existence which ultimately resulted in formation of two kinds of institutes; the religious schools or madrasas and the modern secular institutes. The former educational institutes totally neglected the modern education while the latter neglected the role of religious education, and as a result both types of institutes failed in fulfilling the demands of the Muslims on the educational and intellectual levels. Said Nursi¹ experienced both types of knowledge, modern knowledge and Islamic knowledge, and concluded that both types of knowledge are necessary for the Muslims. Keeping the above mentioned conditions into consideration, said Nursi proposed the model of 'integration of knowledge' which aimed to teach both types of

¹Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was self-taught and became deeply learned in the traditional Islamic religious and intellectual sciences, and he also mastered Western sciences by acquiring proficiency in mathematics, physics, chemistry and astronomy before the age of twenty. In Van he opened his own *madrasah* where he developed his own teaching method, combining methods of the positive sciences with classical religious disciplines.

knowledge under one roof, that is Madrasa education should be taught in modern educational institutes and scientific education should be taught in Madrasa educational institutes.

Concept of knowledge and education in Islam

The Arabic term for ‘knowledge’ is ‘ilm’ which has the dual implication and thus the Arabic word ‘ulum can be classified into revealed knowledge and the experimental knowledge¹, indicates the concept of integrated knowledge by overcoming the possibility of dualism in education. ‘Tarbiyah’, the Arabic word for ‘education’, encompasses more than just sitting in a class room or acquiring of academic degrees. In Islamic context the education implies a state of spiritual and ethical nurturing in accordance with the will of God. Education as defined by Sayed Naquib Al-Attas, “Recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence” (Al Attas, 1980). The definition gives the aim of education and lays the importance of both types of knowledge.

Education aims at building the personality of man in a balanced way and aims at transmitting the values of a particular society to the next generation. Without the education and education systems, the existence of a society is impossible. Education played an important role in developing the Muslim Civilization as defined by Sabir, “The role played by education in the development of Muslim tradition and civilization was also vital and overarching. Islam regards seeking of knowledge as one of the precepts and the most significant elements of constructing the society and designing the civilization” (Sabir, 2006). The first Muslim world education conference held in Makkah in 1977 states the aim of education as,

¹ The knowledge which has been directly sent by Allah on earth through the chosen people (prophets) is revealed knowledge while as the knowledge gained by humans through experiments and observations using his intellect is known as experimental knowledge.

"The education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man's spirit, intellect, the rational self-feelings and bodily senses, education should therefore cater for the growth of man in all aspects, spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic both individually and collectively and motivate all these aspects towards goodness and the attainment of perfection, the ultimate aim of the Muslim education is the realization of complete submission to Allah on the level of individual, the community and the humanity at large" (Al Migdadi, 2001). The aim and philosophy of knowledge in Islam is to come closer to Almighty Allah. Islam's vision of knowledge as mentioned by Syed Qutub is, "As the key to vertical relationship with the creator and horizontal relationship with the creation is the means and method of contributing (materially, morally and spiritually) to virtuous human civilization" (Moussali, 1990).

Islamic education integrates all knowledge forms and disciplines with "Islamic worldview" and recognizes the "jurisdiction" of Almighty Allah in all disciplines of knowledge. In fact, God occupies a centre court in Islamic education. According to Syed Abu al-A'la Mawdūdī, "Education is the sum total of knowledge gained. A man who does not make use of these faculties falls behind others, whereas he who makes use of them excels. Similarly a nation assumes leadership when it devotes itself unspuriously to the pursuit of knowledge handed down to it from the past as well as present" (Maudoudi, 1993). He further argues that knowledge is the only factor which made Egypt, China, Greece, the Muslims or Europeans the leaders of the world, that is to say leadership only depends on knowledge. This progress is the manifestation of what Allah has mentioned in the *Qur'an*:

Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves (*al-Qur'an* 13:11).

Sayyid Quṭb argues that science itself should not be rejected, but its acceptance should be qualified. "Islam", he says, "is in harmony with the laws of the universe and the nature of existence

(*fīrat al-wujūd*) “He believes that, “You should definitely know that the highest aim of the human’s innate character and the most sublime result of the human’s inborn disposition (*fīrat*) are to have faith in God. And the most exalted position and the greatest status in [the ranks] of humanity are to attain the knowledge of God within faith in God” (Moussali, 1990).

Concept of integrated knowledge in early Muslim scholarship

The Muslim academic transition started with the first word of *Qur’anic* revelation ‘*Iqra*’ which means ‘to read.’ Quran repeatedly insisted humans to ponder, to think, to know, to investigate and to unveil the truth hidden in the objects made by Allah in this universe. There are number of *Qur’anic* verses which insist humans to acquire knowledge.¹ Muslims started to gain knowledge in the same way as ordered by Allah and did not differentiate the knowledge into scientific knowledge and revealed knowledge, and gained mastery in all fields of knowledge. The Islamic epistemology or Islamic theory of knowledge brought about all embracing spiritual, moral and conceptual development as well as made remarkable advancement in social sciences, technology and natural sciences when the European world was in dark period (Faruqi, 2006).

Knowledge on the earth began with the creation of first man on earth—Hazrat Ādam (AS). According to the *Qur'an*, Almighty Allah provided man with certain amount of knowledge thanks to which man was made as *ashraf al-makhlūqāt* (best creation) and has been given the trusteeship (*khilāfat*) of the earth. When angels argued about the man’s creation, then Allah taught Ādam (AS) the names of certain things, and Ādam recited the names which the Angles did not know which lifted his status, that is by knowledge. The Holy *Qur'an* says:

¹See the *Qur’anic* verses 96:1-5, 39:9, 27:15, 2:247, 58:11, 4:15, 35:28, 31:20, 46:4, 23:83, 55:11, 55:18 which encourages for carrying out of scientific investigations and also stimulate the believer to think for finding the truth of the universe.

And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell, They said: "Glory to Thee, of knowledge We have none, save what Thou Hast taught us: In truth it is Thou Who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom." He said: "O Adam! Tell them their natures." When he had told them, Allah said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and I know what ye reveal and what ye conceal?" me the nature of these if ye are right (*Al-Qur'an*, 2: 31-33).

About this verse, Nursi writes that, "it was the teaching, due to man's comprehensive disposition, of countless sciences and numerous all-embracing branches of knowledge about the universe" (Nursi, 2015). This was the beginning of the worldly knowledge about the nature of things in the world. The Islamic teachings encouraged the acquisition of knowledge and Muslims made remarkable advances in all fields of knowledge including both religious sciences as well as natural sciences. So no dichotomy was seen in knowledge and all knowledge were taught under one roof. It was the period of western renaissance when knowledge was differentiated into the religious knowledge and scientific knowledge (Sardar, 1985).

Since man has the dual nature, soul and body, indicates knowledge should be of two types, spiritual and material. Man has been given knowledge about God and about his absolute oneness and the necessity of worshipping Him. This knowledge is the knowledge of the spirit or soul of man (Alavi, 1988). This type of knowledge helps man differentiate between good and bad, and right from wrong.

According to al-Ghazālī, there are two types of knowledge, the intuitive knowledge and the knowledge acquired by rational effort. The intuitive knowledge leads to perfection of the soul and the knowledge acquired through experience, observation and rational efforts leads to development of sciences (Alavi, 1988).

The medieval Islamic thought was based on the value system embodied in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* which reflects belief in God,

devotion to God and obedience to God. Islamic education system is aimed at stimulating the moral consciousness of the pupils in bringing about an organic relationship of education with the Islamic ethical system. Besides laying the importance of religious education, *Qur'an* at many places encourages the humans to see, to observe and to employ nature in the service of mankind. The education in the pre-Ghazzālian period comprised of Quran, *Hadith*, Fiqh, Grammar, Arabic literature, Rhetoric, Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy, Mathematics, etc (Alavi, 1988). Ziaudin Alvi writes that “there was not a single Madrasa [educational institutes of Muslim world in medieval period] worth the name where only religious education was imparted. The courses included besides religious sciences, philosophy, literature, medicine, and astronomy” (Alavi, 1988).

Western concept of knowledge

The knowledge produced by the west although produced a remarkable change in science and technology but has failed to produce knowledge which should produce peace in the world which is supposed to be the real meaning of knowledge. The contemporary western knowledge although based on empirical and observational methodology, has neglected the non-sensual, non-scientific, spiritual and religious aspects, without which knowledge is incomplete. Western science, it must be remembered, has, for historical reasons, developed in an atmosphere of hostility towards religion and has acquired a negative attitude towards religion and all non-empirical aspects of belief. These western philosophers think that science and religion are incompatible and may mislead the human beings as Sperry writes, “Religion and science are separate and mutually exclusive realms of human thought, presentation of which in the same context leads to misunderstanding of both scientific theory and religious belief” (Sperry, 1988).

The western knowledge is mainly criticised because of over reliance on sensual and empirical data and total negligence of revelation and religious scriptures. Many challenges have arisen in the human mind throughout the history but the greatest challenge in our

times is the challenge of knowledge because today the knowledge is disseminated throughout the world by west, and the nature of western knowledge has become problematic for the whole humankind particularly for Muslims as it did not possess the true purpose as being unjustly disseminated with biased approach and thus brought confusion in man's life rather than peace and justice which is the real meaning of knowledge. The western education system started to enter in the Muslim world from the 15th century and dominated fully by the end of 20th century.

Nursi's faith based education

The Nursi's faith based educational model provides an alternative education system to the Muslim world which has the capacity to face the challenges of atheism, modernism and materialism. Said Nursi is of the view that this faith based education model will lead to the delightful life for the Muslims as he writes, "The most delightful happiness and the sweetest bounty for jinn and human beings are to attain the love of God within the knowledge of God. The purest joy for the human spirit and the finest pleasure for the human heart are to experience the spiritual taste contained within the love of God. Surely, all true happiness, pure joy, pleasant bounty, and sheer taste are all found in and experienced through the knowledge of God and the love of God" (Nursi, 2015). The aim of humans is to know the God and worship Him, (*Al-Qur'an*, 51:56) and for knowing the God knowledge is essential but only that knowledge is fruitful which brings humans close to Almighty Allah. Both the universe and the revelation have been created by Almighty Allah so they can never go in opposite to each other.

Said Nursi writes that there is possibility of studying both revelation and scientific knowledge together as both have been created by one creator that is Allah, so there is no possibility of contradiction between the two as the western scholars think. The compatibility of science and revelation has been further explained by Syed Quṭb, an influential thinker in contemporary Islamic thought, that science itself should not be rejected, but its acceptance should be

qualified. "Islam", he says, "is in harmony with the laws of the universe and the nature of existence (*fīrat al-wujūd*) (Cook, 1999). He believes that, "You should definitely know that the highest aim of the human's innate character and the most sublime result of the human's inborn disposition (*fīrat*) are to have faith in God. Regarding the compatibility of science and religion, Said Nursi writes that, "When science is used as the proof for the existence of God, it confirms the compatibility of the two (Religion and science), which in turn should apply for the framing of educational policies" (Marazi, 2015). Said was in the search of this reality that science should be used for searching the truth, and for knowing this reality he suggested that union between the two is necessary. The aim of education in Islam is to, "cultivate in man a personality that abides by the teachings of religion, and is hence assured of salvation and happiness in the eternal life of the Hereafter" (Al-Attas, 1979). "Faith necessitates affirmation of Divine unity, which in turn necessitates submission to God, which in turn necessitates reliance on God, which in turn necessarily leads to happiness in this world and the next" (Nursi, 2015).

According to Nursi, "knowledge without the insight of the heart turns into a form of ignorance. The heart disease of the nation is religious weakness; it can be treated through strengthening it" (Ahmed, 2014). Religion without reason cannot help find the truth about the God and often leads to associating partners to Allah and on the other hand logical science without religion is fruitless and lacking as he states that, "Belief is attained through reason's power of choice" (Bolay, 1995).

Integration of knowledge

For the intellectual crises which are prevailing in the Muslim world Said Nursi gave the model of 'Integration of knowledge' which aims at overcoming the crises of Muslims. He believed that there can be no progress when education is devoid of human and spiritual values, "Education that is entirely scientific and materialist can produce nothing but tools and modern mechanics. It alienates man from

beauty and estranges him from wisdom" (Ahmed, 2014). Allah has made the whole creation subservient to man, and commanded man to use it and make its fruits available to all. Obviously this necessitates mastery and manipulation of the elements and forces of nature and in turn, a real and complete knowledge of them. For achieving this purpose Nursi suggests, "Students of the modern education system should be trained in religious subjects, and similarly, products of the religious schools should be well equipped with the modern trend of the world, so that the two sections of the society could have enough opportunity to understand both the sciences utilizing their skills" (Ahmed, 2014). His educational ideas were mainly based on the combination of the two systems of knowledge; religious sciences and modern sciences, in the belief that the science can never be in conflict with the religion of Islam as both have been created by Almighty Allah and understanding of the two sciences will definitely help in the strength of the religious beliefs, if properly understood. Said Nursi laid the great importance of integration of knowledge and argued that, "the light of the conscience is the religious sciences and the light of the mind is exact sciences, and reconciliation of both manifests the truth. The student's skills develop further with these two (sciences) and when they are separated from the former superstition and from the latter corruption and skepticism are born" (Ahmed, 2014).

Conclusion

Said Nursi is of the opinion that modern sciences should be taught in the *Madrasas* and religious subjects should be taught in the secular or modern schools. By providing the concepts of faith based education and integration of religious and scientific knowledge, said Nursi's thinking is very applicable and most rewarding in overcoming the educational crises in the Muslim world. The concept of 'Integration of knowledge' model, if applied today will help secular schools to save them from being without religion, while those in the religious schools will be saved from bigotry. Science and technology can't help man in overcoming the present crises unless and until it is not guided by the eternal laws that is Islamic revelation. Said Nursi stands for

integration of knowledge are very progressive, futuristic and rewarding, given the pathetic situation of Muslims in educational field worldwide (Marazi, 2015). The Nursi's educational model provides faith based education system, which has the capacity to face the modern challenges, and in inculcating moral values by reading both the religious sciences and modern sciences.

Today the educational system of the Muslim world is based on western secular education system which needs to be changed into the Islamic ones by applying the Nursi's model of education system that is Madrasat-uz Zahra model. Said felt the need for education in knowledge as well as education in character. The Nursi's model of education is based on the integration of knowledge, faith and education, which will help in the renewal of civilization, as education is in the centre for building civilization. The Nursi's concept of faith based education and knowledge are equally instrumental and helpful for researchers, educational reformers and the educational institutions who are in the search for integration of knowledge to inculcate moral character among the learners. By applying the Nursi's model of faith based education model in the educational institutes, students will develop a sound moral character with gaining the mastery over the science and technology. In short the writings of Nursi will help in the advancement and prosperity for Muslims, both in this world and hereafter.

References

- Ahamed, Anees. (2014). Said Nursi's concepts of education and vitalization of Muslim culture and civilization with special reference to Southeast Asia. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2 (9), 215-223.
- Al-Attas, Syed Naquib. (1980). *The concept of education in Islam: A framework for an Islamic philosophy of education*. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC.
- Alavi, S. M. Ziauddin. (1988). *Muslim educational thought in the middle ages*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

- Al Migdadi, Mahmoud Hamid. (2001, No. 7). Issues in Islamization of Knowledge, man and education. *Revue Académique des Études Sociales et Humaines*, 3-16.
- Bolay. (1995). Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's view of philosophy. *Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, 'The Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi'*. Istanbul: Yeni Nesil.
- Cook, Bradley J. (1999). Islamic Versus western conceptions of education: Reflections on Egypt. *Learning, knowledge and cultural context. International Review of Education*, 45 (3/4), pp. 339-357.
- Faruqi, Yasmeen Manhaz. (2006). Contributions of Islamic scholars to the scientific enterprise. *International Education Journal*, 7(4), 391-399.
- Marazi, Hamidullah. (2015 September). Empowering education with values and integration of religion and science: Madrasah al-Zahra model. *Proceedings of ICIC2015–International Conference on Empowering Islamic Civilization in the 21st Century*. Kuala Terengganu: University Sultan Zainal Abidin.
- Maudūdī, Syed Abu al-Ala. (1993). *Taleemat* (Rauf, S.M.A., Trans). Delhi: Markazi Maktabi Islami Publishers.
- Moussalli, A. (1990). Sayyid Qutb's view of knowledge. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 7 (3).
- Nadvi, Muhammad Junaid. (2013). Incorporating contemporary social science with Islamic philosophy. *World journal of Islamic History and Civilization*.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. (1988 No. 1, 9-23). Islam and the Problems of Modern Science, *Aligarh Journal of Islamic Thought*,
- Nursi, Said. (2015). *The letters*. New Delhi: Birla Publications.

Sabir M. M, (2006), The Ultimate End of Islamic Philosophy of Education. *The Dialogue.*

Sardar, Ziauddin. (1985). *Islamic futures; The shape of ideas to come.* London and New York: Mansell Publishing Limited..

Sperry, Roger. (1988). Psychology's mentalist paradigm and the religion-science tension. The *American Psychologist*, 43(8), 607-613.