

MUHAMMAD NEJATULLAH SIDDIQUI ON ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND ITS PRIORITIES

Introduction

Nejatullah Siddiqi became known all over the World when he was awarded the Shah Faisal Award in 1981 due to his original contributions for the development of Interest-free financial and banking system.

He had earlier contributed tremendously towards the development of Islamic thought. He and some of his colleagues in Aligarh, India during 1950s and 1960s published a quarterly journal by name Islamic Thought and focussed on the importance of research and methodology from Islamic perspective.

He wanted to create a team of Muslim intellectuals and scholars who can dedicate themselves for Islamic research in all areas of modern Western disciplines.

The main goal of his intellectual contribution was to present Islam scholarly as a viable alternative for development of culture and civilization.

Quite before the development of the movement for Islamization of Knowledge in 1982 he dedicated himself for the development of the discipline called Islamic economics.

Quite contrary to many Islamic scholars and thinkers he laid the foundation for the evolution of Islamic thought in line with the True, Authentic, and Universal worldview which became known as Tawhidic worldview.

The worldview of Tawhid was drawn from True, Authentic, and Universal Knowledge [TAUK] generally known as Islamic Revealed Knowledge.

Nejatullah Siddiqi took serious interest in the problems of people as the members of humanity in general and the problems of the Islamic Ummah along with the problems of India and Indian community.

He never isolated himself from the people of India and their problems. His approach was inclusive, comprehensive, and holistic.

All his writings and intellectual contributions demonstrate that he took Islam as the worldview and the code of life, source of culture and civilization.

During the process of evolution of thought, he highlighted some new dimensions and made some conclusion which deserve our attention.

Basically, he was involved in the process of Ijihad for the development of Islamic thought.

His Ijihad and thought did not confine to the wellbeing of some people but involved the entire humanity.

I will focus on his positive thinking and evolution of thought from one of his articles which was published in the American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences, vol 28, number 3 in the Summer of 2011 entitled, **Islamization of Knowledge: Reflections on Priorities.**

He argued that the goal of Islamization of Knowledge movement must focus on the service of humanity. For this purpose, the pioneers and supporters of IOK must involve in their debate all people irrespective of their religion, ideology and ethnicity.

Involvement of people of all shades of ideas is badly needed. Humanity as such should be the target of IOK movement.

He realized humanity needs spiritual and moral foundation of life and society. Hence, he expected from the upholders of IOK that they will infuse the real spiritual spirit and moral excellence through their intellectual and scholarly contribution.

He genuinely asserted the proposal presented by IOK needs to attract humans towards spiritual and moral excellence which is by itself a challenge.

He said: We need to design human life leading to felicity in the life on earth as well as success in the life after death [p. 18]

This goal of IOK must not confine to Muslims alone but MUST extend to all human beings.

These insights are to be drawn from both the Islamic revealed knowledge and rich Islamic heritage [18].

He created a relationship between IOK and Ijtihad.

He said: What is missing in our intellectual endeavours is ijihad. We must be capable to apply the old dictums on the new situations.

In other words, for Nejatullah Siddiqi IOK needs to be understood as the project of Ijtihad for people for the sake of peoples. According to him one of the goals of IOK movement is to produce people with high class insight into the worldview of Islam and the social sciences, a point which was emphasised even by Mawlana Mawdudi during 1944 and later by Ismail Faruqi in 1982. All this requires creative skills and determination.

For Nejatullah Siddiqi IOK is nothing less than the movement of creation of new knowledge. There is no place in his scholarly discourses for repetition and imitation. He expected through the process of IOK, people will create and produce new knowledge based on ijihad, mere consumption of available knowledge is not the goal of IOK.

He made it clear that we need to expand human knowledge by creating new knowledge [p19] which should be universal and relevant to all.

Hence, the target of IOK must be to reach out humanity. We should study everything with open mind but from a critical point of view.

We must demonstrate that our new ideas and knowledge is more useful than. the existing one.

IOK as an epistemological and civilizational move is the necessity of humanity.

He re-emphasised what was done in IIUM by Dr AbdulHamid AbuSulayman. He said: Revelation has to be reinstated as a source of Knowledge.

For better understanding and new knowledge we have to explore both: the universe and our inner selves and the meanings of the Quran and Sunnah

We cannot downgrade any piece of knowledge. We need to study all existing branches of knowledge including the signs of Allah swt existing in the universe.

We cannot make the worldview of Islam subordinate to the Western civilization.

In the process of IOK we must be able to distinguish between values and ideas.

We should make use of all the ways of studying nature and reality but all of them are subservient to the Quranic revelation.

According to him, the Islamic epistemology urges for the study and understanding of all forms of knowledge. It is indispensable for all of us to take into consideration the time and space factors.

The most challenging aspect of this epistemological exercise is the need to clearly understand the difference between universal values and changing circumstances.

We must need to preserve our core values. This should be the top priority of IOK project.

When we plan to create new knowledge, we also need to create an environment conducive and inclusive of all. Without creating conducive environment, we cannot create new knowledge.

Our approach is neither hasty nor emotional but more deep, profound and intellectual. Only through scholarly approaches and contribution we can be able make a new history. Hence, profound intellectual contributions are needed.

We have to create our own but new future rather for entire humanity. Looking at the past or present will not suffice to sustain anymore. Future can be totally different. So, we need to be more and more creative.

World of tomorrow would be totally different. Hence, we need to define the whole project of IOK in its proper perspective that is in terms of creation of new knowledge. For him that is IOK which means creation of new knowledge. No model of integration and assimilation can work out in future except creation of our own world.

He said: We need a methodology for creating new knowledge with full awareness of the need to make the use of new knowledge based on deep spirituality and morality.

Here at this stage, he says, we need to work together with all those who share our vision. Every aspect of our life would be impacted by the advent of new knowledge and how it will be used. We must be patience - oriented, able to take a longer view of the things. Our position and argument must be capable to attract everyone. Exclusive approach will create distance.

A fresh recourse to the Quran and Sunnah is the need of the hour.

Thinking must be encouraged rather critical thinking.

Islamization of knowledge project can succeed only if it responds to the situation by encouraging fresh thinking, frank discussion, mobilizing all available insights into the matter irrespective of their authority.

If this aspect is missing, then it needs to be reinjected into the project of IOK.

There must be a call for fresh, independent, innovative thinking to solve the newly arising problems INVOLVING EVERY THINKING MIND. Afterall IOK is a universal project.

According to him the required spirituality and moral vision would be capable to sustain IOK project. They are available with us in the Quran and Sunnah.

What is needed is reaching out to humanity to build a consensus around this vision. We need to invite humanity to join us in evolving a universally acceptable spiritual and moral vision of life and society.

He suggested research in Islamic revealed knowledge, social and natural sciences should be directed more and more towards problems facing all people.

It is true but identification of common and urgent problems by itself is a problematic and challenging area. For me the most pertinent problems humanity is facing is related to the importance of spirituality and moral excellence.

The humanity today lacks badly the true vision of spirituality and sources of moral excellence. It is up to the practitioners of IOK who have to focus their energies towards fostering the true vision of spirituality and morality.

Finally, he recommended that “every Muslim should be encouraged to approach the Quran and Sunnah directly for personal as well as public matters”. [p32]