



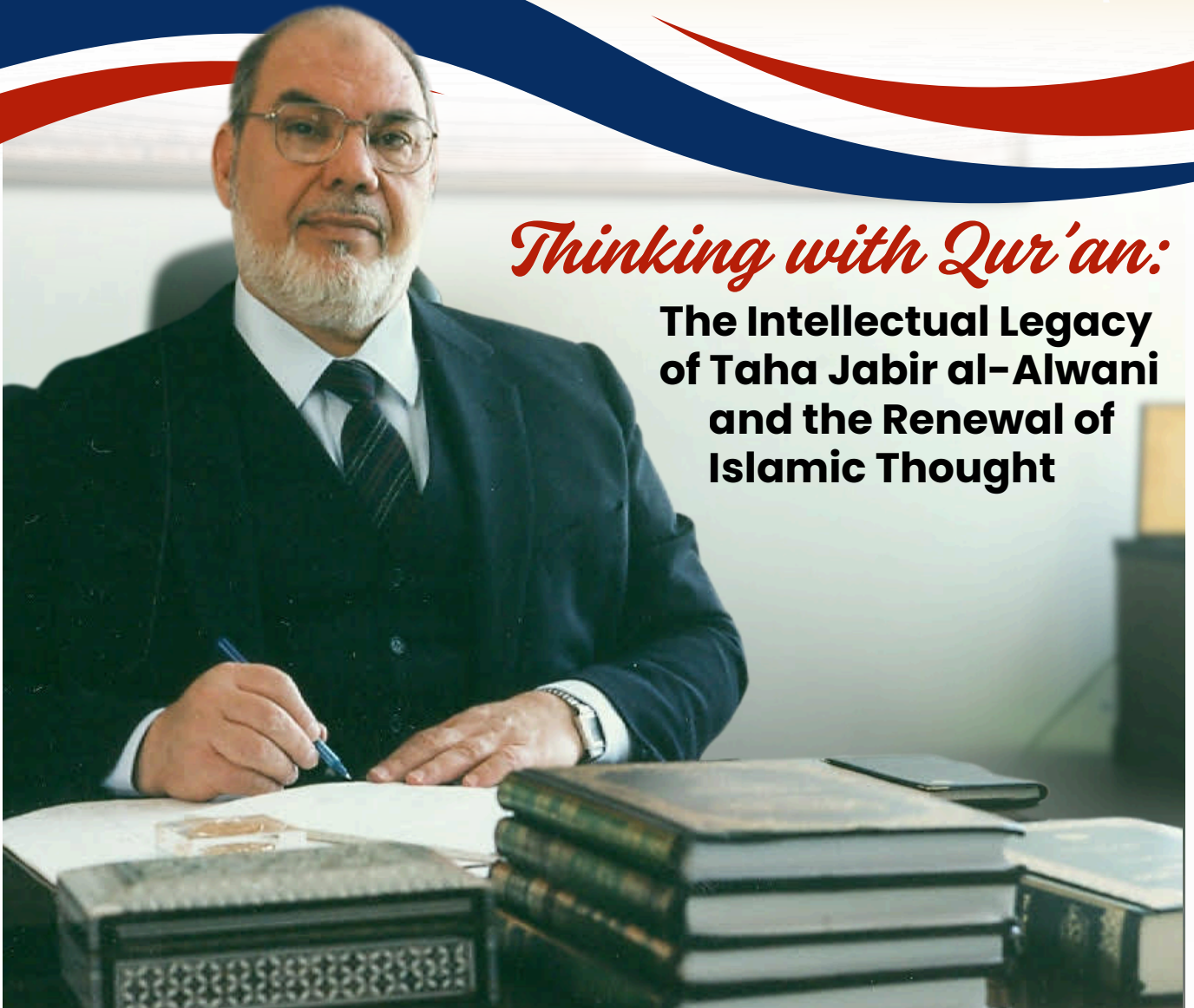
IIIT Students' *Magazine*



Volume 3, Issue no: 1

Ramadan and the Purification of the Heart:

**A Student's Guide to Seizing the Month of
Change in a Diverse World**



Thinking with Qur'an:

**The Intellectual Legacy
of Taha Jabir al-Alwani
and the Renewal of
Islamic Thought**

Sixth Edition, 2026
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Published by

IIIT-IIUM Publications
International Institute of Islamic
Thought (IIIT-IIUM)
Jalan Gombak 53100, Gombak,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Printed in Malaysia by
Qourtuba Publisher

Editorial Message



Prof. Dr. Dawood A.Y. Al-Hidabi
*Chief Editor, Coordinator & Advisor,
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

**In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful,
the Most Compassionate**

Dear Students, Scholars, and Readers,

It gives me profound joy to witness the publication of the 6th IIIT–IIUM Students Magazine, a platform that reflects not merely student activity, but the intellectual pulse of a generation seeking meaning, coherence, and purpose in an increasingly fragmented world.

This issue arrives at a time when the Muslim ummah faces not only political and social challenges, but deeper epistemological questions: How do we think? How do we learn? How do we remain faithful to revelation while engaging the realities of our time? These are not abstract concerns; they shape the very direction of our institutions, our scholarship, and our lives.

The contributions in this magazine beautifully reflect this intellectual seriousness. In the reflection on marital harmony, we see how Islamic jurisprudence is not a rigid technical system, but a moral framework designed to preserve dignity, stability, and mercy within the family. In the student reflection on Ramadan, we are reminded that academic excellence without purification of the heart produces imbalance. Knowledge must be accompanied by sincerity (ikhlāṣ), discipline, and consciousness of Allah.

The article on the intellectual legacy of Taha Jabir al-Alwani highlights a matter that is central to IIIT's mission: the renewal (tajdīd) of Islamic thought through the re-centering of the Qur'an as the primary epistemological authority. Al-Alwani did not call for abandonment of tradition nor surrender to modernity; rather, he insisted on disciplined thinking with the Qur'an, restoring coherence between revelation, reason, and lived reality.

This approach resonates deeply with the educational vision derived from Qur'anic guidance. As reflected in the educational meditation on Surah Al-Zumar (53–55), the Qur'an offers a pedagogy of hope, responsibility, and reform. It rejects despair while demanding accountability. It affirms dignity while guiding transformation. Such balance must define our academic culture: rigorous yet compassionate, principled yet adaptive.

The narratives of student journeys further illustrate that excellence is not accidental. It emerges from discipline, mentorship, intellectual humility, and sincere engagement with knowledge as an amānah (trust). When IIIT and IIUM collaborate, we do not merely produce graduates; we cultivate morally anchored thinkers capable of serving humanity with wisdom and integrity.

The reformist vision of Muhammad al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi reminds us that civilisational renewal begins with moral reform at the -

foundational level of society. For al-Ibrahimi, education and family were inseparable pillars of revival. Even the historical reflection on Merku Theru reminds us that civilisations endure not through wealth alone, but through values: trust, responsibility, continuity, and institutional vision. Education is the bridge between heritage and the future.

Dear Readers,

The purpose of this magazine is not entertainment alone. It is formation. It is an exercise in disciplined expression, reflective thought, and collective intellectual growth. Writing, reflecting, and publishing are acts of responsibility. They train the mind to think clearly and the heart to remain accountable before Allah.

Let this 6th edition be not only a publication, but a renewed commitment to the Qur'anic project of knowledge integration, ethical leadership, and intellectual maturity.

May Allah grant barakah in your knowledge, sincerity in your intentions, and wisdom in your engagement with the world.

With sincere prayers for your continued growth,



Prof. Dr. Dawood A.Y. Al-Hidabi

Chief Editor, Coordinator & Advisor, IIIT - IIUM

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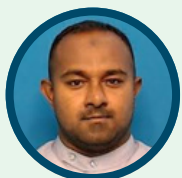
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Negotiating Epistemic Rupture:

Evolution of Integration of Knowledge Discourse in Sri Lanka



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Background

For generations, Muslim thinkers have grappled with a fundamental dilemma: how can Islam engage modern knowledge without surrendering its ethical and intellectual core? This question has haunted Islamic thought since the early encounters with Western modernity and continues to shape debates across the Muslim world today. In the nineteenth century, reformist intellectuals such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897), Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), Tahir ibn Ashur (d. 1973), and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1937), working across regions from Cairo to the Indian subcontinent, placed this dilemma at the centre of their intellectual projects. They challenged Muslim societies to confront modern science, philosophy, and political thought critically rather than defensively, and they sought to anchor reform within long-standing institutions of learning, most notably Al-Azhar and Al-Zaytuna Universities.

The postcolonial era gave this debate new urgency and organisational form. In the late 1970s, the creation of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) marked a decisive shift from scattered intellectual reflection to a coordinated global movement. IIIT's ambition was bold: to rethink how knowledge itself is produced by integrating Islamic epistemology with modern academic disciplines. This vision inspired the establishment of international Islamic universities and a vast intellectual output, hundreds of books, conferences, and -

curricular experiments, devoted to redefining the relationship between faith, reason, and modernity.

Yet for all its global reach, the integration of knowledge project has largely been imagined through the lens of Muslim-majority societies, where institutional support and political space are often assumed. What remains strikingly underexplored is how this intellectual movement resonates beyond those settings, particularly among Muslim communities living as minorities. In such contexts, questions of identity, citizenship, and educational access fundamentally alter what "integration" can realistically mean.

This article turns to Sri Lanka to address that blind spot. Examining how Muslim intellectuals and institutions in a minority setting have engaged with the integration of knowledge discourse, this article highlights the tensions, adaptations, and possibilities that emerge when global Islamic ideas meet local political and social realities. In doing so, the Sri Lankan case invites a broader rethinking of whether the integration of knowledge can be a universal project, or whether it must be reimagined from the margins.

Early Debates

Like elsewhere, colonialism introduced an epistemic project in Sri Lanka that manufactured a civilizational dilemma, framing modernity as a Western enterprise in -

opposition to Eastern tradition. This epistemic rupture generated new and pressing questions for Sri Lankan Muslims, who, as a minority community, had to critically engage with emerging new systems of knowledge and institutions that had become vital for communal survival and progress in the colonial administrative hierarchy. In this context, Islamic thinkers such as M.C. Siddi Lebbe (d. 1897) emerged as pioneering intellectuals who responded systematically to this epistemic fracture.

Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Siddi Lebbe argued that traditional modes of Islamic knowledge production were insufficient to confront the challenges posed by colonial modernity. As a trained lawyer and committed community activist, he sharply criticized sections of the religious leadership who opposed modern knowledge on the grounds that it was inherently un-Islamic. He argued that resisting modernity would result in the long-term stagnation and marginalization of the Muslim community. In response, he articulated a reformist vision that aimed to integrate Islamic normative foundations with the advancements of modern science and education. This vision inspired the establishment of the first Muslim school, Zahira College Colombo, which sought to encourage Muslims to excel in modern education while preserving their Islamic cultural identity. While affirming that engagement with modern science was inevitable, and necessary for communal progress, he simultaneously warned against scientism, the belief that science alone constitutes the totality of truth. To counter this reductionist logic, Siddi Lebbe emphasized the importance of promoting Sufi metaphysics as a spiritual and intellectual safeguard, ensuring that Muslim engagement with modern knowledge remained ethically grounded and metaphysically informed.

Post-Colonial Developments

Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Siddi Lebbe argued that traditional modes of Islamic knowledge production were insufficient to confront the challenges posed by colonial modernity. As a trained lawyer and committed community activist, he sharply criticized sections of the religious leadership who opposed modern knowledge on the grounds that it was inherently un-Islamic. He argued that resisting modernity would result in the long-term stagnation and marginalization of the Muslim community. In response, he articulated a reformist vision that aimed to integrate Islamic normative foundations with the advancements of modern science and education. This vision inspired the establishment of the first Muslim school, Zahira College Colombo, which sought to encourage Muslims to excel in modern education while preserving their Islamic cultural identity. While affirming that engagement with modern science was inevitable, and necessary for communal progress, he simultaneously warned against scientism, the belief that science alone constitutes the totality of truth. To counter this reductionist logic, Siddi Lebbe emphasized the importance of promoting Sufi metaphysics as a spiritual and intellectual safeguard, ensuring that Muslim engagement with modern knowledge remained ethically grounded and metaphysically informed.

Unlike Siddi Lebbe, Azeez lived in a period of increasing regional mobility, which allowed him to travel to the Muslim world and engage with contemporary debates and developments. During his travels, he met the rector of Al-Azhar University, Mustafa Abd ar-Razik (d. 1947), and discussed the integration of knowledge, particularly the contributions of Muhammad Abduh to the reform of Al-Azhar. After intensive engagement with the writings of Islamic thinkers and intellectual leaders, Azeez became convinced in the 1960s of the need to establish an Islamic university in

a broad range of contemporary Islamic and human sciences, reflecting a holistic model of knowledge integration. In terms of achievements, the multidisciplinary grounding through which Islamic studies were taught at NIIS enabled its graduates to pursue higher education across a wide range of disciplines, Sri Lanka, an institution that could produce religious scholars well-versed in both Islamic sciences and modern knowledge. He eloquently articulated this vision in his historical essay, "We Need an Islamic University" (1963). Dr. Mohamed Shukri (d. 2020), an alumnus of Zahira College Colombo and a student of Azeez who also studied at the University of Edinburgh, carried forward these debates. However, he emerged as a more radical critic of modern Western knowledge, grounding his perspective in Sufism and Islamic ethics. In this regard, Shukri aligned more closely with Sidde Lebbe than with his teacher Azeez, who advocated for the promotion of modern education at any cost, seeing it as essential for securing the future of Sri Lankan Muslims as a second-order minority in the country. Viewed in context, Shukri's insistence on re-grounding knowledge within an Islamic framework was countercultural: while most intellectuals emphasized the importance of modern knowledge, he highlighted the epistemic challenges it could pose to the Muslim community. He did not reject modern knowledge outright; rather, he urged Muslims to remain critically aware of its limitations. Expanding on this vision, from the later 1970s onwards, Shukri wrote extensively on Islamic theories of education, political science, arts, research methods, economics, ethics, and environmental ethics in the local Tamil language. His central message emphasized that modern Western epistemology fails to account for the full complexity of the human being, particularly its spiritual dimension, and he insisted that modern education systems be restructured to reflect the Islamic conception of human nature.

The Rise of Naleemiah Institute of Islamic Studies

By the early 1970s, debates over the demand for an Islamic university and the rethinking of Islamic epistemology had evolved into a broader communal conversation. These discussions prompted community leaders, including activists, philanthropists such as Mohamed Naleem, and academics, to establish the Naleemiah Institute for Islamic Studies (NIIS), an institution dedicated to producing Islamic scholars grounded in both Islamic and human sciences. The founding of the institute marked a paradigm shift and represented the first systematic attempt to institutionalize the long-standing discourse on integrating Islamic and human sciences within a single framework. Interestingly, both AMA Azeez and Dr. Mohamed Shukri were involved in the project, envisioning a transformative impact on the country's religious and social leadership. Later, Dr. Shukri became the director of the institution after returning from his post-graduate studies at University of Edinburgh.

The Naleemiah Institute for Islamic Studies (NIIS) has undergone several phases in pursuing its objectives. Initially, with no local model to guide them, the institute's pioneers travelled to Pakistan to engage with Islamic thinkers, including Maulana Maududi (d. 1979). They were particularly inspired by the Al-Aleemiyyah Institute of Islamic Studies and the writings of its founder, Fazlur Rahman Ansari (d. 1974), who extensively explored knowledge integration in the 1970s. Ansari's book *Quranic Foundations and the Structure of the Muslim Society* especially influenced the vision of NIIS's founders. In its early years, NIIS offered traditional Islamic sciences alongside a selection of human and natural science subjects within a seven-year study program. In 1996, the institute signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Islamic University, Islamabad, -

enabling it to expand and integrate its curriculum. The program came to include, alongside Islamic sciences, subjects such as sociology, philosophy, logic, and studies of the Muslim world. Over the past decade, the curriculum has further evolved to incorporate -including Economics, Education, Political Science, International Relations, Management Studies, and Sociology.

Transnational Influence

Over the past decade, debates on the integration of knowledge within and beyond the institution have been significantly shaped by graduates who pursued their studies in Malaysia, particularly at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Many IIUM graduates were exposed to broader debates on the Islamization and integration of knowledge, as well as discussions on curriculum reform in Malaysia. They subsequently sought to reimagine and contextualize these intellectual engagements within the Sri Lankan setting. In this regard, it is important to note the role played by the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in providing scholarships to many of these students, thereby facilitating their academic training. An examination of the research projects they undertook reveals a clear attempt to translate the integration of knowledge paradigm into concrete and practical applications, moving beyond purely philosophical concerns. Their theses covered a wide range of fields, including politics, finance, law, history, education, language, sports studies, inter-faith dialogue, comparative religions and to core Islamic disciplines. Upon returning to Sri Lanka, many of these graduates played an active role in strengthening community organizations and educational institutions. Beyond these individual contributions, over the past decade Islamic Institutions such as NIIS has entered into Memoranda of Understanding with two leading institutions, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Universiti -

Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), thereby fostering vigorous exchanges of knowledge, ideas, and academic collaboration between the institutions which have kept the Islamic theory of knowledge at the centre of their academic programmes.

Conclusion

The story of the integration of knowledge in Sri Lanka is ultimately one of adaptation and resilience. Beyond grand theoretical debates, the phenomenon took shape through everyday concerns: how a Muslim minority could preserve its religious and cultural identity, secure access to education, and engage with modern forms of knowledge without sacrificing its ethical and spiritual foundations. Over time, these concerns were translated into concrete educational initiatives and institutional experiments. Most notably, the Naleemiah Institute of Islamic Studies emerged as a key site where local needs were addressed alongside an intellectual openness to global Islamic and modern scholarly currents.

This journey was strengthened by connections beyond Sri Lanka. Encounters with Islamic universities and scholarly debates in Malaysia offered fresh perspectives and practical models, helping local scholars move from ideas to action. What they brought back was not a ready-made blueprint, but inspiration to rethink curricula and educational goals in ways that made sense within Sri Lanka's unique social and political setting.

At the same time, the experience points to a continuing vulnerability. Without strong state support, minority institutions often rely on their own limited resources. Here, international Islamic universities can make a meaningful difference, by offering academic recognition, mentorship, and partnership. Such engagement helps ensure that these local efforts are not isolated experiments, but part of a shared and evolving global Islamic educational conversation.