

Book Reviews

BOOK REVIEW

Sardar, Ziauddin and Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education: From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge*, London and Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, pp. 266+ix, 2017. ISBN: 9781565649774 (paperback)

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مراجعة كتاب

إعادة التفكير في إصلاح التعليم العالي: من الأسلمة إلى تكامل المعرفة

تأليف: ضياء الدين سردار وجيري توماس

مراجعة: محمد ياسين جادة

أستاذ مساعد في الدراسات الإسلامية، كشمير، الهند

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The “crisis” in the Muslim world is attributed variably to several reasons ranging from political (leadership) to spiritual, from educational to social degradation, from economic to technological, to name a few. There is a great deal of discussion on each of these domains attempting to find the main problem and the follow-up prospective. And the process still goes on. The book under review is in line with and attempts to grapple the Muslim “crisis”, and locates it in “educational”. It advocates a “vigorous reform in higher Education” as the key factor to realize the higher objectives of Muslim life. The book came into fruition after a number of deliberations, discussions, and conferences spread over a decade held across the Atlantic Ocean. It has four chapters and a forward.

In its foreword, the book makes explicit that the crises in Muslim societies are deeply rooted in “intellectual and methodological” decline (p. vii). Similarly, it argues that the overall problem in higher education is attributed to “epistemological and ethical in nature” (viii). Moreover, it envisions a worldview based on the things Quranic/tawhidic; for it focuses on the revealed knowledge coupled with the human knowledge in a wider paradigm of diversity and plurality of societies. In other words, it promotes a universal concept of knowledge: devoid of any compartmentalization, fragmentation, division, schisms into worldly and transcendental; or religious and secular; or still in a broader perspective Islamic and un-Islamic. Since the “Islamization of knowledge” was projected as a viable remedy to Muslim educational crisis, it only posed many other challenges to the Muslim societies especially in the West not to speak its merits. Consequently, Muslim scholars pitched rather for the “Integration of knowledge”—a seemingly viable concept that still is in its infancy stage: the present book a great step in this endeavor.

Ziauddin Sardar in his first chapter “Mapping the Terrain” while citing some interesting works such as Harry Lewis’s work *Excellence Without a Soul*; Bill Readings *The University in Ruin*; and Michel Godet’s grappling with “the crisis of higher education”, attempts to explicate the meaning of “crisis” for it encompasses multiple connotations. For Sardar, the crisis in education is the outcome of a host of crises: capitalism; economic; environmental; spiritual; and religious (p. 2). After a literature review, Sardar attributes the crisis to “the rise of neoliberalism, increasing globalization and advancing communication technologies”, and claims the “universities have become big business” (p. 5). He further expresses his disappointment that the higher education has forgotten and thus deviated from its original role: from being the harbinger of “acquiring, transmitting and preserving knowledge” to the role of “service providers catering for their clients and consumers” (pp. 5-6). We can easily gauge from today’s consumerist market what Sardar claims, bears weight. That identity, reality, values, ethics, moral dimensions of knowledge hardly find any space in Modern higher education. Furthermore, Sardar asserts that the western universities too are not impervious to the pernicious nature of Globalization. Sardar views that the modern universities no longer function independently. Funding agencies such as World Bank and IMF have eroded their independence rather universities are shaped through a dominant “economic paradigm” (p. 9). What Sardar aims is

to do away the neoliberal economic setting of the universities.

Similarly, Muslim universities across the globe have failed to and missed from producing any scientific and technological advancements because “What is taught is not science as such but scientism—a blind faith in scientific method” argues Sardar; therefore this approach must be replaced with result oriented “critical science education” and to be incorporated with other disciplines i.e., interdisciplinary approach must be achieved rather than fragmented disciplinary approach (p. 59). To achieve this, Sardar believes, the collaboration between the Muslim and Western universities is most important. Sardar provides useful discussions on a range of issues from the history of higher education to modern fallacies and problems of scientific education in the Europe. His engagement with the subject provides many useful facts toward reforming the higher education. Castigating the contemporary education (both in natural and social sciences), Sardar expresses displeasure with what is being taught in our educational institutions is “the history of literature..., but not the future of writing” (p. 57), “What is taught is not science as such but scientism-a blind faith in Muslim societies.” (p. 59). Sardar’s deep analysis and vast experience in the subject reminds the readers about the repercussions of scientism. Scientism is a faith, philosophy, and a view that the science provides the only genuine knowledge in reality, or in other words, a belief that the science is the only paradigm of truth and rationality. He cautions the implications of modern emerging technologies which is indispensable. He opines for such education system which is applied rather than theoretical.

The second chapter, “From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge” provides a synthesis, in Sardar’s words, of various endeavors carried out under IIT on the reform of higher education in the Muslim world. First, Sardar believes that the importance of dynamic “education system” is fundamental to preserve, spread, and develop sustainable knowledge laden with spiritual, cultural and value aspects. For “conception of things” “vocabulary” “meaning” signify different for different nations. Sardar argues that the modern academic disciplines/knowledge is laden with ideological and cultural bias, and is the product of the West to perpetuate the Worldview of the west. He is careful of the importance of academic “disciplines”. A discipline defined and perpetuated by the West has a power to “discipline”, to colonise the future, and to define (pp. 96-99). So, what is to be done to free the modern higher education from these inhuman values is, according to Sardar, “to deconstruct the definitional power of the modern knowledge system... and its western worldview; and to produce alternative paradigms of knowledge formation, that take into account the histories, legacies and traditions of Islam and offer a more humane and value based appreciation of what constitutes learning and its advancement” (p 100). Moreover, due to the rapid changes in the technology, the paradigms offered, Sardar states, have to be “post” normal. The new work plan offered must be holistic, balanced, include science and technology to realize the interconnection of everything i.e., the unity of creation, the unity of humanity, and the unity of life (p. 106). Here lies the conception of “integration of knowledge” Sardar wants to put forward. It will require a lot of organizational work. It asserts

on the cooperation of scholars and scientists from across the globe to frame and integrate a new paradigm of knowledge which has its own terminological defining power away from the influence of particular western setting. Since, the “Islamization of Knowledge” project has lost its relevance and is dead but according to Sradar, it has left behind a legacy of concern about the need of Muslim thought, and cautioning about the Eurocentric nature of social sciences.

Third chapter “The Integration We Seek” by Jeremy Hanzell-Thomas highlights the perilous situation of overall Muslim education and argues since Modern Muslim universities “lack creative and original approaches to knowledge acquisition and production” thus contribute little to the scientific advancements. (p. 142). Hanzell-Thomas confirms Sardar’s “unity in diversity” approach within knowledge paradigm for it is important to realize the integration of knowledge. He points that people generally divide reality into competing and mutually exclusive ideas, approaches and paradigms of thought which dilute the universality of knowledge conception. He explains how important is it to have and know the exact meaning of such terms as dichotomization, dialectic, multiculturalism, Pluralism, modernity vs traditionalist, secular vs relative. All these terms depict a particular place and time in history thus, Hanzell-Thomas argues “time, place and people cannot be ignored in the development of human understanding” (p. 147). While discussing the scope of integration, Hanzell-Thomas believes that “we need an Integral mode of consciousness which was not fixed on dualistically opposed categories...fixed frames, competing paradigms” (p. 149). Like Sardar, He is critical of Islamization of Knowledge project because the project perpetuates the “dichotomy of secular and Islamic knowledge” (p. 151.), and mirrors the doctrine of clash of civilizations. Hanzell-Thomas endeavors to work beyond dichotomies to integral perspective to realize the holistic education system. He aspires of a holistic university where a student of higher education must realize that there are no final answers; to realize the multi-leveled conception of ‘aql (intellect) that incorporates also the spiritual dimension where a good teacher not only plays a role of a *mu’allim*-knowledge giver but also a *murrabi*—a nurturer of souls and developer of character (pp.156-159). The concept of holistic university put forth by Hanzell-Thomas is significant for it will balance the clash between material and spiritual. The spiritual rather ethical dimension in education system would definitely help enriching the intellectual and epistemological domain because linking education with the transcendental would change the perception of being things. The changing perception would try to find the purpose and objective of the universe and the knowledge we get.

The last chapter” Towards a Language of Integration, Hanzell-Thomas explains the importance of “language” “words” and “discourse” in realizing the goals set forth for the integration of knowledge project. He discusses the divine purpose enshrined in the diversity of tongues. Tongue has potential to influence the thinking whoever listens so much so that “words plainly force and overrule the understanding”. Since “language is the basic tool through which we learn, teach, adapt to change and advance knowledge”, (p. 188) says Hanzell-Thomas. Accordingly, what he recommends is to define

“a set of key terms in our own specific way, give them a contemporary meaning, and incorporate them within the Integration of Knowledge discourse” (p. 188). Moreover, Henzell-Thomas while discussing the problematic terminology, he cautions of the ideological loading of “isms” terminology. He asserts for the excavation of the best meanings for terms to realize the best and excellent higher education that addresses the totality of human facilities (p. 218). It would thus be fascinating to know how successful and widespread this type of project be accomplished and realized.

Said that, *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education: From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge* is a meticulously researched, multi-levelled, and incisive book which offers useful and interesting paradigm shifts to realize the higher objectives of knowledge in the Muslim world. It presents and propagates the “Integration of Knowledge” as a viable project to reform the higher education system across the globe. The book would definitely prove a useful tool for all those who want to contribute or nurture the education system in one way or the other.

Articles in Arabic Language

الأبحاث باللغة الإنجليزية