

EDITORIAL

Education in Muslim countries and the Makkah Declaration

In the Makkah Declaration signed by all the Heads of Muslim States in April 1977 the following statements were made about the Islamisation of education and the mass media:

“Believing the tenets of Islam which preach that the quest of knowledge is an obligation on all Muslim, we declare ourselves determined to co-operate in spreading education more widely and strengthening educational institutions until ignorance and illiteracy have been eradicated and to take measures aimed towards the strengthening of Islamic education curricula and to encourage research and *Ijtihād* among Muslim thinkers and *Ulema* while expanding the studies of modern sciences and technologies.

We also pledge ourselves to co-ordinate our efforts in the field of education and culture, so that we may draw on our religious and traditional sources in order to unite the *Ummah*, consolidate its culture and strengthen its solidarity, cleanse our societies of the manifestation of moral laxity and deviation by inculcating moral virtues protecting our youth from ignorance and from exploitation of the material needs of some Muslims to alienate them from their religion.”

This Declaration is based on the realisation of the importance of making Islam the basis of education for all Muslim countries, but after the lapse of more than twenty years it is surprising to find that very little has been done to make Islam the focal point of education or of the mass media. In many parts of the Muslim world there has been increasingly more secularisation of various institutions during these years with damaging consequences for the growth and development of the Muslim elite. The rich intellectual heritage of Islam developed on the basis of the Qur’ān and Sunnah by Muslim scholars over a long period of time is now coming under renewed threat from forces working both within and outside Muslim societies. This can be seen in the present state of education in many Muslim countries where modernisation has been synonymous with secularisation, as if the index of progress is the degree of material advancement, with little commitment to religious values.

The curricula used in most Muslim countries are overtly secular and do not reflect the aims and objectives of the Makkah Declaration. A close

examination shows that the curriculum and textbooks are not focussed on the awareness of God the Supreme Being, the need for the Prophetic guidance, and the spiritual nature of human beings. The teachings of the Qur'ân and Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) do not appear except in lessons on religion. There is hardly any reference to the religious basis of such qualities as Truth, Justice, Righteousness, Mercy, Love, Compassion and care towards all creation, with the result that the importance of implementing them in one's life is lost. In addition to these problems, the present curricula usually also fall short of inculcating an awareness of the history and traditions of one's own country. As such curricula help to promote a secular rather than religious attitude, they contribute little to the development of a good moral character (*akhlâq*). In addition to this, there are few children's stories based upon the lives of famous Muslims as role models; this results in an improper development of an Islamic personality. There is a conspicuous absence of Islamic elements in many parts of the curriculum. In fact it is not uncommon to find elements in the curriculum that are subversive of an Islamic way of life or Islamic sentiments—either through explicit texts, suggestions or pictures. Acting against the spirit of the Makkah Declaration, they fail to incorporate ideas that enhance and consolidate the notion of a global Islamic community (*Ummah*).

Recently, the Islamic Academy, Cambridge completed a critical survey of the educational policy, the curriculum and textbooks currently used in different types of schools in Bangladesh and examined them in the light of the Makkah Declaration as enunciated above. A summary of the research report will be published in the next issue of this journal. The research team was not unduly critical of the current situation but they were alive to the subtle ways in which it could corrode Islamic culture and hamper the growth of an Islamic personality and Islamic society in contradiction to what the Makkah Declaration aimed to achieve.

Islamic education is coming under increasing dangers of intrusion from various forces, both within and without. For example, in Bangladesh the Kudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission Report (1974) still provides the basis of education in the country. Although the education system has been reformed several times since then, as can be seen from the recommendations of various committees appointed by the government of Bangladesh, it has not departed from its basic secular philosophy that was at the foundation of the recommendations of the Kudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission. This Commission sought to develop a secular curriculum and prepare textbooks accordingly, to free primary education from religious influence to a large extent, to remove compulsory religious education from the secondary level and to water down the religious teaching in the *madrasah* education. There was no attempt to ingrain in pupils the principles of Islam and its rich intellectual and cultural heritage, its moral and spiritual values, its universal law embodied in the SharTM'ah and its concept of social justice. The pupils were far removed from the realisation that the glory of Islam is rooted in its ability to educate its followers to imbibe its deep religious values, contribute to human and material progress

and purify Islamic thought of all that may be alien or divisive of the *Ummah*. Such an education system only produced pupils with no real insight into the nature of Islam and its relevance to the modern world.

Some private organisations are trying to develop the Islamic curriculum and textbooks with an emphasis on Islam as a total way of life in order to develop in pupils an Islamic attitude and a willingness to put it into practice, but the sheer force of the secular institutions aided by powerful foreign and some local organisations seems to undermine such activities. It is a dilemma—people who are basically religious, are caught up in a situation where they are forced to learn what they find detrimental to their own culture and beliefs, read materials in newspapers that they find unpalatable and watch on the TV what they abhor. This situation is an expression of a deep-rooted malady of the *Ummah*, a spiritual decline which makes it vulnerable to attacks of all kinds. The Makkah Declaration encapsulated an ambitious plan, the charting of a new horizon for the *Ummah* to usher in a new era of progress and development—while remaining faithful to the religion—but it is yet to be implemented in full.

The above Declaration was aimed at drawing on religious and traditional sources to strengthen the Muslim society, and to protect its youth from becoming alienated from their religion. As an Islamic education draws concepts and principles of teaching all branches of knowledge from the Qur'ān and Sunnah and other traditional Islamic sources, it contributes to the mental, moral and spiritual development of human beings as perceived by Islam, and promotes goodness in its totality, including worldly prosperity. This is achieved through an *integrated* form of education that is sensitive to the requirement of human beings for living a worldly life and yet not oblivious of the need for spiritual progress. This approach gives a positive direction to the purpose of education and prevents all the disciplines becoming autonomous and independent of each other and places them on a hierarchical scheme in relation to the divine knowledge. The utilitarian and humanistic education that we have in the West, and which has been adopted by Muslim countries for worldly progress, has insidiously robbed people of their religious sensibilities—people have been brainwashed into believing in the 'goodness' of secular ideology which so often poses as a 'redeemer' in an age full of confusion and restlessness. It has, in fact, taken away from its supporters the purpose and meaning of existence and replaced it by a loss direction and certainty. But, unless the purpose of human existence is kept in view, education will lead to a loss of balance and harmony and to eventual disruption of the human self and society.

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