

Book Review

Rethinking Reform in Higher Education by *Ziauddin Sardar & Jeremy Henzell-Thomas. The International Institute of Islamic Thought. 2018*

The Educational Crisis in Muslim Societies has drawn continuous attention of scholars and researchers all over the globe. Various prominent scholars have endeavoured to address the crisis but have not presented any practical solution to the problem that would have applicable and practicable on all soils. The present work “*Rethinking Reform in Higher Education*” is a better attempt to reconcile the dichotomy of education and reform the higher educational system. The book includes discourses and discussions on the current state of education. The work is basically a renovated version of the concept papers and conclusions drawn from the symposium held on ‘Reform of Higher Education in Muslim Societies’. The book can be considered as a fundamental building block and milestone in educational reform mission. The book is comprised of 4 chapters.

In chapter 1, Professor Sardar has systematically revealed the teaching panorama of universities. First, Sardar has identified the different fallacies of universities; he believes that disintegration of nation- state is responsible for the educational crisis, instead of mentoring citizens universities have turned into global markets and corporations. The neoliberalism has changed the entire paradigm of education; universities are now catering to capitalist concerns. Further, the author has commented upon the inadequacy of conventional ways of knowing which he believes are unrelated, outmoded and old-fashioned for the next generation to come. To encounter with the problem he seems to aim for a shift towards the production of new knowledge. Sardar is cheering for the fresh educational paradigm as he states, “New methodologies within the existing paradigms are not going to take us to a new paradigm” (p. 24). The author is suggesting multi and inter-disciplinary approaches for the knowledge production by further embracing transdisciplinary methodology as an effective tool for fashioning new paradigms in higher education. Also, complexity would contribute virtually to the cause of shaping the paradigm. The overwhelming influences of political and economic authority are the main causes of intellectual ruin in higher education system. The need of the hour is to liberate universities from these manacles and to inculcate moral values and ethics and it should be the prime responsibility of university.

In next chapter, Sardar is aiming to integrate various recommendations and suggestions into an overall framework. The word “Integration” is the dominant theme of this chapter where author seeks to develop a holistic education in more universal sense. He is trying to make us understand the need for transition of the term “Islamization”. Hitherto, the term Islamization was the pivotal term of the work plan presented by The International Institute of Islamic Thought in 1982. Prof. Sardar aptly seeks to replace the term “Islamization” by “Integration”. According to the author integration is a more suitable term in present times. In the words of Sir Henzell Thomas, Sardar has argued so succinctly in critique of Islamization, islamizing disciplines already infused with a materialistic metaphysics and western secularist ethics is tantamount to a cosmetic epistemological facelift and nothing more. It would perpetuate the dichotomy of secular and Islamic knowledge that the project was so keen to avoid (p. 151). Integration means to him, the interconnection and unified perspective on knowledge and education irrespective of civilizational and cultural bias that must include science and technology. The old paradigms are not now applicable in the current situations, the requirement of which is the shaping of new paradigm. World is changing drastically, it is becoming more globalized and more interconnected. The task of reforming Muslim education is more profound than what have hitherto imagined. It has two basic components: to deconstruct the definitional power of the modern knowledge system complete with its disciplines, institutions and its western worldview; and to produce alternative paradigm of knowledge formation that take into account the histories, legacies and traditions of Islam and offer a more humane value based appreciation. The author believes that the tool of integration would be a panacea for the dichotomy in education. At the end, author is emphasizing on the need of four nodes: promotion of values, deconstruction of definitional power of the modern knowledge as mentioned earlier, retrieving the original stimulation of Islamic tradition in order to revisit philosophical and intellectual heritage of Islam and rediscover the ideas that have contemporary relevance and need of a group of sociologists and futurists to work on contemporary trends. The author believes that these nodes have their own subject areas; they work in an adaptable and cohesive fashion to shape the new discourses of Integration of knowledge.

In chapter 3, Henzell Thomas is commenting upon the nature of integration. In his discourse he seems to pull up the prevailing dichotomy in higher education which has caused intellectual bankruptcy of minds. The binary thinking, he believes, are implanted in us that

gives us the mean to judge and act rapidly and biasedly. However, The Quranic injunctions emphasize on the use of faculties with which we have been endowed. He further goes on to say that there is a need of holistic university that would embrace intellectual insights, creativity, independent thinking, imagination, liberation of human mind and spirit, inquisitiveness and receptivity of the open heart and mind. It is only by the mean of education that the values, social responsible virtues and transforming power of relationship can be inculcated in the learner. A good teacher, he wonderfully says, should not be only a transmitter (*Mu'alim*) of knowledge but also a nurturer (*Murabbi*) of the souls.

The last chapter of the work "*Towards a language of Integration*" is exclusively dedicated to the development of lingua-franca by which we could shape the new paradigm. Language is the basic tool which enables a person to shape his ideas and thought. It is a lingua-franca through which we learn, teach and share knowledge. Commenting upon the diversity, Henzell Thomas argues, is natural not in terms of language only rather it includes culture, race and religion also. God has created us in nations and tribes in order to know and acknowledge existence of each other, as mentioned in the Quran, so diversity is natural and a divine scheme; what we desire is unity in diversity. At the end, author is emphasizing upon the necessity for the construction of common glossary of terms and their clear definitions pure from paradoxes. The confusion and ambiguity of a word may lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation; so, the first step is the creation of glossary of key terms in own specific way to serve as the building blocks for the integration of knowledge discourse.

Rethinking Reform in Higher Education makes an important contribution to our overall understanding of current state of education in Muslim societies. The book is no doubt a milestone and paramount in the writings on education. It is a very prompting work that develops deep insights into education, learning and its pedagogy by embracing comprehensibility and diversity. The work would act as a catalyst for educational reformation; it would stimulate further researches on the project. In order to chart a viable way forward, the book invites all stakeholders into the discussion. To conclude, it is pertinent and worthy to mention that the book is the optimum framework for integration of knowledge project.

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