7.1 INTRODUCTION

During the medieval period of Indian history, which roughly spreads over a span of about eight hundred years, Indian society had witnessed an intimate and influential interaction with Islamic culture and civilisation through its followers, which after the advent of Islam in seventh century A.D. in Arabia, had gradually reached out to many Asian, African and European societies. Islam, for its followers, was not merely a faith or a religion, rather it was a complete way of life, which they had come to realise through their deep understanding of the Islamic philosophy and knowledge based on the holy Quran and the Hadith of Prophet Mohammad. In eleventh century A.D., followers of Islam gradually arrived onto the Indian soil and influenced socio-cultural aspects of life including education. In this unit, we will discuss the concept and nature of knowledge in Islam, sources of this knowledge, its influence on education in India during the medieval period.

7.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- differentiate between fundamental and liberal Islamic view of knowledge;
- define the concept of knowledge in Islamic tradition;
• identify the sources of knowledge;
• discuss the major types of knowledge in Islamic tradition;
• discuss the issues raised on theory of knowledge;
• describe various modes of communicating knowledge;
• explain the common features of Islamic knowledge; and
• assess the impact of Islamic knowledge on contemporary and present system of Indian education.

7.3 ISLAMIC VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE

In order to understand the Islamic view of knowledge, first we need to be clear about the Islamic concept of Reality, as the quest of truth inherent in this reality leads to creation of knowledge and is transmitted to mankind through a particular system of education. The philosophical concepts of Reality and knowledge in Islam and the fundamental Reality of God and worship, etc. will be discussed here. These concepts have had their direct bearing on the education system that was in vogue in India during the medieval period.

Islam, as mentioned in the Quran, is Theocentric because the only true reality, according to it, is God. God is the ultimate reality as He is the Ultimate Being and the only true reality is One God, Allah, the Necessary Being. Everything else in this creation is contingent upon His Will. God, according to the Islamic scripture is Absolutely Real (al Haqq). He is not a projection of man’s mind nor is He a product of resentment of those who have fallen short. He is neither an illusion of those who have remained infantile, as Freud opines, nor is He an opium of the masses as conjectured by Marx. He is Eternally Living, transcending the limitations of spatio-temporal order, being the First, the Last, the External and the Internal. The exact nature of God is not knowable for He is beyond comprehension.

“He is omnipotent, to Him is due the primate origin of everything. He is the creator. He created the Heavens and the earth and what is there in the universe. He is the sole Self Subsisting Being, all pervading, Absolute Reality” (Holy Quran).

From the most important reality, which is One God, has emerged one humanity, which though divided into races and tribes, male and female, is essentially one in its purpose on earth and in its ultimate destination. The unity of God who is Truth, the Light, logically implies the unity of knowledge and the unity of prophethood. The unity of knowledge means that there is no bifurcation between what is called secular and religious sciences, neither in their teleology nor in utility. The knowledge contained in Islamic scripture is basically concerned with man, and its primary intent could be interpreted as functional to man’s positive cognitive-moral growth as well as to vindicate the orderliness of this universe.

Thus, according to Islam, God is the source of all knowledge and he has given knowledge to man. Some of knowledge is revealed by God to his messenger, the Prophet Mohammad in the form of the Quran, which comprises essentials of morals and faith, etc., and some knowledge is given to man which he can explore through his own efforts. This includes knowledge related to the natural phenomena. So, according to Muslim philosophers, human knowledge is of two types: (1) Knowledge based on proof; and (2) Knowledge based on direct experience through religious devotion and revelation. The knowledge obtained by Sufis is obtained by religious devotion whereas knowledge of the Prophet is revealed by God. Al Farabi (Quoted in Inati, 1998) a Muslim philosopher, has classified knowledge into practical and theoretical. The latter knowledge helps the soul to achieve perfection and the former is related to human conduct. In the opinion of another famous Muslim philosopher, al-Ghazali (Quoted in Leaman, 1998) there are two types of knowledge, viz. the intuitive knowledge and
knowledge acquired by rational effort. The intuitive knowledge leads to perfection of the soul and the knowledge acquired through experience, observation and rational effort leads to development of sciences. The former knowledge may be termed as religious sciences and the latter as liberal sciences. Ibn Khaldun (Quoted in Leaman, 1998) also has classified knowledge into two kinds and has used almost the same basis of this classification as has been applied by other former Muslim philosophers. The two kinds of knowledge according to him are, Ulum Tabaiyya or Aqliyya (knowledge based on intellectual and rational processes of the mind) and Ulum Naqliyya (knowledge received without the use of rational physical processes of the mind). The former Ulum (knowledge) are based on observation and deduction, and the latter depend on revelation. Ulum Aqliyya comprise Logic, Arithmetic, Astronomy, Physical and Biological Sciences, etc and Ulum Naqliyya include Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Kalam, Theology, etc. Fakhr al-Din al Razi (Quoted in Leaman, 1998) in his book Jami-al-Ulum classifies and defines various Muslim sciences in a more elaborate manner. He terms them as aqli (intellectual) sciences and naqli (traditional) sciences. Among naqli or traditional sciences again he has made two broad categories viz religious sciences and linguistic sciences. Religious sciences include theology, jurisprudence, dialectics, Quran and Hadith whereas linguistic sciences deal with grammar, syntax, etymology, prosody and poetry. Aqli or rational sciences, the other major category, includes natural philosophy, physics, astronomy, alchemy, optics and music.

7.4 FUNDAMENTAL AND LIBERAL VIEWS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE

Islamic philosophers have generally classified knowledge into two broad categories as stated above. It is generally held by them that the knowledge given by God through revelation i.e. Quran is the fundamental and noblest knowledge. It is held that the Quran is the complete and final revelation from God so it is a complete guide for man in his worldly affairs as well as for his salvation. It is the knowledge that forms the basic core of all knowledge that man may acquire and hold, and this being fundamental for successful living of mankind must be possessed by all for their good of all kind. They argue that there is no other knowledge except that which is based on the Quran that can guide man. The Quran is the knowledge par excellence and the life and teachings of Prophet Mohammad to whom the Quran was revealed is the most perfect interpretation of the Quran. So the Prophet’s life and sayings (traditions and Hadith or Sunna) are the true guides for Muslims. Thus, the Quran, the Hadith, and Shariyah (God’s Laws) are the essential and fundamental elements of knowledge worth acquiring by Muslims. Devotion to God through worship is the practical aspect of the fundamental knowledge acquired through the Quran and the Hadith.

On the other hand lies the second kind of knowledge which is the knowledge of rational sciences or knowledge of liberal or secular sciences which should also be acquired by Muslims. In fact the Quran itself repeatedly encourages and stimulates Muslims to explore this kind of knowledge by following rational and systematic process of observation, reflection, discovery, etc. However, the first kind of knowledge which reveals the true relationship between man and God should form the basis and foundation for the second one. Islamic scholars argue that if the knowledge of the second kind is obtained without reference to the first then it will lead to confusion and will create doubt and skepticism. It is for this reason that Muslim philosophers made the knowledge based on the Quran and the Hadith obligatory for all Muslims and the knowledge of liberal sciences for those who can do justice to it. However, one terms that through the Quranic injunctions none is barred from exploring these liberal sciences, rather all are encouraged to explore the knowledge hidden in the universe by the use of intellect and wisdom and to use it not only for the good of man. In fact all should, through it, develop a deeper understanding of the powers and qualities of God.
7.5 DEFINITIONS AND MEANING OF KNOWLEDGE IN ISLAMIC TRADITION

As has been stated earlier, the theory of knowledge has been the main preoccupation of the Muslim philosophers. Muslim philosophers have been primarily concerned with human happiness and its attainment. They may have different views on human happiness which may range from this-worldly happiness to that-worldly happiness. However, all of them agree that it can only be achieved through knowledge and all have advocated acquisition of knowledge for the good of human beings and their societies.

Islamic philosophers, much in the same way as the Greek philosophers did, agree that knowledge of the reality can be attained at its highest level by application of the intellectual tool of logic and through this ability, to perfect the understanding and establish contact with the principles which underlie the whole of reality. But at the same time they agree that knowledge also includes essentials of morals and faith, etc which have been handed down by God to man by direct revelation through His prophets.

So, as Inati (1998) rightly put it, they consider knowledge to be the grasping of the immaterial forms, natures, essences or realities of things. They agree that forms of things are either material (that is existing in matter) or immaterial (existing in themselves). While the latter can be known as such, the former cannot be known unless first detached from their materiality. Once in the mind, the pure forms act as the pillars of knowledge. The mind constructs objects from these forms and with these objects it makes judgements. Thus Muslim philosophers, like Aristotle, divided knowledge in the human mind into conceptions (tasawwur), apprehension of an object with no judgement, and assent (tasdiq)- apprehension of an object with a judgement, the latter being, according to them, a mental relation of correspondence between the concept and the object for which it stands. Conceptions are the main pillars of assent and without conception one cannot have a judgement. In itself conception is not subject to truth and falsity but assent is. In Islamic philosophy, rightly says Inati, conceptions are mainly divided into the known and unknown. The former are grasped by the mind actually, the latter potentially known conceptions are either self-evident (that is, objects known to normal human minds with immediacy such as “being”, “thing” and “necessary”) or acquired (that is, objects known through meditation, such as “triangle”).

With the exception of the self-evident conceptions, conceptions are known or unknown relative to individual minds. Similarly, Muslim philosophers divided assent into the known and unknown, and known assent into the self-evident and the acquired. The self-evident is exemplified by ‘whole is greater than the part’, and the acquired by the world is ‘composite’. In the Kitab-al-tanbih ala sabil as saada (The Book of Remarks Concerning the Path of Happiness) al Farabi (Quoted in Inati, 1998) calls the self-evident objects ‘the customary, primary well known knowledge, which one may deny with one’s tongue, but which one cannot deny with one’s mind since it is impossible to think their contrary’. Of the objects of conception and assent, only the unknown ones are subject to inquiry. By reducing the number of unknown objects one can increase knowledge and provide the chance of happiness (Inati, 1998). Islamic philosophers agree that the seat of knowledge in human beings is the soul of man or spirit and the intellect which are in turn based on his dual nature that is, he is both soul and body. Moreover, God has also equipped man with faculty of right vision, which guide him to the right path, provided an effort is made by him. This effort only will help him in discrimination of right from wrong and truth from falsehood. To attain truth and knowledge of reality and to be able to follow the command of God, therefore, it is essential that man should try to assert the supremacy of the rational soul and suppress the animal and irrational soul.
7.6 SOURCES AND TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

In Islam, the Quran is considered the primary source of knowledge. It believes that everything that exists including knowledge originates from God. This has been repeatedly stated in the holy scripture in these words: "Truth comes from God alone, be not of those who doubt"; "God is all knowledge. He is truth, with him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knows but He" (Quran). Along with the Quran, Sunna or Prophet’s Traditions is another fundamental source of knowledge. According to Islam, knowledge is also acquired through use of logical tools of rational thinking and systematic observation of the matter in this universe.

Revelations (Wahy), which all prophets received from the Divine source, is the most certain knowledge. The Quran also indicates that there exist other sources of knowledge, the proper study and orientation of which will complement the Truth of revealed knowledge, for ultimately they are derived from the same source: God, the Originator of all things. The other sources of knowledge are natural phenomena, human psychology and history.

Prophet Mohammad as the other source of knowledge is the perfect and excellent interpreter and example of the Quranic interpretation. The Prophetic Sunna, to many scholars, are based on the prophet’s many conducts and sayings and are a part of authentic knowledge and help in interpretation and understanding of the messages and commands of the Quran. The Quranic revelations and the Sunna thus may form parts of the same type of knowledge i.e. prophetic knowledge and same basic source of revelation and prophetic sayings.

The third source of knowledge as stated earlier, is the systematic and rational observation, reflection, and discovery of the reality lying in the physical matters scattered on earth and in the universe.

Thus all these sources of knowledge lead to creation of two broad types of knowledge viz (i) knowledge based on proof (al burhan) and (ii) knowledge based on direct experience through religious devotion and revelation (al qawl ash shariah). al-Ghazali (Quoted in Leaman, 1998) calls these two types of knowledge the intuitive knowledge and the knowledge acquired by rational efforts. The intuitive knowledge leads to perfection of soul and knowledge acquired through experience, observation and rational effort leads to development of sciences or liberal sciences.

In Islamic philosophy there are two theories about the manner in which the number of unknown objects is reduced. One theory stresses that this reduction is brought about by moving from known to unknown objects, the other says that it is merely the result of direct illumination given by the divine world. The former is the upward or philosophical way, and the latter one is the downward or prophetic way based on revelation (wahy). According to the former theory, movement from the known objects of conception to the unknown ones can be effected chiefly through the explanatory phrase (al qawl ash shariah). The proof (al burhan) is the method for moving from the known objects of assent to the unknown ones. The explanatory phrase and the proof can be either valid or invalid, the former leads to certitude, the latter to falsehood. The validity and invalidity of the explanatory phrase and proof can be determined by logic which is a set of rules for such determination. Ibn Sina (Quoted in Inati, 1998) points out that logic is a necessary key to knowledge and cannot be replaced except by God’s guidance, as opposed to other types of rules such as grammar for discourse (which can be replaced by a good natural mind) and matter for poetry (which can be replaced by good taste). By distinguishing the valid from the invalid explanatory phrase and proof, Inati also argues that logic serves a higher purpose, namely, that of disclosing the nature or essence of things. It does this because conceptions reflect the reality or nature of things and are the cornerstones of the explanatory phrase and proof. Because logic deals only with expressions that correspond to conceptions, when it distinguishes the
valid from the invalid it distinguishes at the same time the realities or nature of things from their opposites.

7.6.1 Logic and Knowledge

Since logic deals only with the known and unknown, it cannot deal with anything outside the mind. Because it is a linguistic instrument (foreign in nature to the realities of things), it cannot deal with such realities directly, whether they exist in the mind or outside it, or are external to these two realms of existence. It can only deal with the states or accidents of such realities, these states comprising links among the realities and intermediaries between the realities and language. Logic therefore deals with the states of such realities as they exist in the mind. Such states are exemplified by 'subject' or 'predicate', 'universality' or 'particularity' 'essentiality' or 'accidentality'. In other words, logic can deal with realities only in that these realities are subjects or predicates, universal or particular, essential or accidental and so on. Because the ultimate human objective is the understanding of the reality, essence or nature of things and because the ultimate logical objective is the understanding of conceptions, logicians must focus on the understanding of those conceptions that lead to the understanding of the essence if they intend to serve humanity. Ibn Sina (Quoted in Inati, 1998) points out that since the essences are universal, such expressions are also universal in the sense of representing universal conceptions such as 'human being', not in the sense of being universal only in expression, such as Ahmad. A universal expression can be applied to more than one thing, as the last two examples show, but one must keep in mind Ibn Sina's (Quoted in Inati, 1998) distinction between these two types of universal expressions: the former represents reality, although indirectly, the latter does not. It is only the former with which the logician should be concerned.

Considering that the discussion of universals occupies a central place in Arabic logic, it is important to focus briefly on this subject to ensure understanding of the proper objects of knowledge of the natures of things. Muslim philosophers divide universal expressions into five types, known together as the five predicables:

1. Genus: Genus refers to the common nature of all the species that fall under it, such as 'animalist' for 'human being', 'dog', 'cat' and so on. As such it tells us what the general nature of a thing is.

2. Species: Species refers to the common nature of all the individuals that fall under it such as 'human being' for Ahmad, Kamal and John. As such, it tells us what the specific nature of a thing is.

3. Difference: Difference refers to that which differentiates the members of the genus, such as 'rational', which differentiates the species of human being from other animal species; it tells us which thing a being is. These three universals are essential to a thing; that is without them the essence will not be what it is. Property and common accidents are accidental, in that they attach to the thing but are not part of its essence.

4. Property: Property refers to something that necessarily attaches to one universal only, such as 'capacity for laughter' for 'human being'.

5. Common accident: Common accident refers to quality that attaches to more than one universal, either in an inseparable manner such as 'black' for 'crow', or in a separable manner, such as 'black' for 'human being'. The inseparability of the common accident, however, is only in existence. (Inati, 1998)

7.6.2 Types of Knowledge: Philosophical and Prophetic

Going by the details of the sources of knowledge it may be said that in Islamic philosophy only two broad types of knowledge exist. One may be called as philosophical knowledge and the other as prophetic knowledge. The former knowledge is based primarily on man's interaction with and experience of the physical reality existing in the surrounding
universe or environment which comes to him, through his sensory system, in a highly logical manner. The latter, the prophetic knowledge consists of that knowledge which is not based on apparent sensory experiences rather, which comes down to the human mind of a prophet through direct revelation, illumination or wahy descended on him by God. This knowledge may also be called as divine knowledge. The modes of communication of this knowledge have been discussed in detail in the next parts of this unit. However, it needs to be remembered that Muslim philosophers believe that both types of knowledge are the representation and manifestation of the same common Truth expressed by the common Reality of one God and both should have a commonality of goal of knowledge and education.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.
b) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of the unit.

1. Differentiate between fundamental and liberal views of Islamic knowledge.

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2. What are the sources of knowledge in Islam.

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3. Differentiate between philosophical knowledge and the prophetic knowledge.

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7.7 THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE IN ISLAM: ISSUES RAISED

The basic sources of prophetic knowledge in Islam viz the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet are applied to handle various issues concerning man in general and Muslims in particular through the method of Islamic Hermeneutics which helps in the interpretation of the two fundamental sources which were closely connected with the historical struggle of the Prophet and the earliest Muslim community. The process of hermeneutics enables the community understand and apply values, principles and injunctions enshrined in the two sources for various issues and contemporary problems. Thus it becomes very important that a proper interpretation of the Quran and Sunna is done by the community by application of a proper method of hermeneutics. In fact, this interpretation has been quite important for Muslims from the earliest times. It is due to the application of different methods of interpretation of these sources as well as the use of two important roots of the doctrine viz Ijma (agreed opinion of theologians and lawyers on the question at hand) and Qiyas (an analogy) along with the Quran and Sunna (particularly during the early period of Islam) that the four different schools of Islamic law and theology which are the main parts of Islamic jurisprudence have
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come into existence. These schools are known by the names of their main interpreters viz Hanefite School, Shafaii School, Malikii School and Humbalites School. Their methods of interpretation are elaborate and systematic. In some interpretations however, there have been some important deviations from the teachings of the Quran and Sunna when taken as a unitary whole. The deviations have been caused primarily by the lack of a comprehensive and systematic articulation of the Islamic world view and excessive dependence on grammatical and philological analysis. It is in this context that scholars have suggested that application of the approach of the sociology of knowledge would be useful in our understanding of Islamic sources and thought.

However, while using this approach the methods used by other classical scholars, for example, use of philological and semantic analysis and the "occasions of revelation" (asbab-al-nuzul) are not altogether ignored rather, these are also utilized extensively wherever required. This may be noted that Muslims have been, to a great extent, forerunners in the discipline of sociology of knowledge when they placed a high priority on the importance of occasions of revelation in the understanding of the Quranic legal injunctions. In fact the process of tafsir (exegesis) of Quranic verses by scholars which continues till the present time is not possible without occupying oneself with the stories and explanations of the reasons for revelation of these verses. Islamic scholars argue that since the Quran is from God and since God's knowledge and wisdom that is imparted in Quran is not confined to or exhausted by, a society and its history, the intent of the sociological approach should not be construed to relate divine wisdom and they confine it to a specific socio-historical moment; its purpose is to affirm His wisdom in dealing with His creatures who exist within the space-time dimensions. Moreover, the Quran is basically concerned with man. In its statements about the Divine, the primary intent could be interpreted as functional to man's positive cognitive-moral growth as well as to vindicate the orderliness of this universe.

7.8 MODES OF COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE

Based on our earlier discussion on sources and categories of knowledge as recognised by Muslim philosophers and scholars in the light of the Quran and Sunnah it may stand clear that there are two major modes of communication of knowledge to the mankind. One mode is based on revelation from God to his Prophet and sometimes, as asserted by a section of scholars, to the mystics through the approach of mysticism or sufism and the second mode is which based on a rational process of experience and observation by human intellect. These modes of communication of knowledge are termed as prophetic and philosophical ways that lead to the formation of concepts and universal essences forming the corpus of human knowledge. Muslim philosophers have first discussed the structure of the human soul and then the steps through which the universals on pass their way to the place of knowledge. As stated above, the conception comes to the mind through either the philosophical way or the prophetic way. The philosophical way requires the individual to first use his/her external senses to grasp the universals, as they exist in the external physical world mixed with matter. Then the internal senses, which like the external senses are a part of animal soul, take in these universals and purify them as much as possible. The imagination is the highest internal sense in which these universals settle down until the next cognitive experience occurs. These philosophers believe that above the senses there is the rational soul which has two parts: the practical and theoretical intellect. The theoretical intellect is responsible for knowledge development and practical intellect for proper management of human body to guide it to do good and avoid the bad.

The prophetic mode of communication of knowledge is much easier and simpler. One need not take any action to receive the divinely given universals; the only requirement seems to be the possession of a strong soul capable of receiving them. This may be
noted that while the philosophical and rational way moves from the imagination upward to the theoretical intellect, the prophecy way takes the reverse path from the theoretical intellect to the imagination. For this reason, knowledge received through the philosophical or rational mode is knowledge of the nature of things themselves, while knowledge of prophecy is knowledge of the nature of things as wrapped up in symbols, the shadows of the imagination.

Thus prophetic and philosophical truth is the same, but it is attained and expressed differently. One of the most important contributions of Islamic philosophy is the attempt to reconcile Greek philosophy and Islam by accepting the philosophical and prophetic path as leading to the same truth.

To sum up, it may be said that there are two broad sources of knowledge that the Quran recognises—revelation (wahy) or prophetic knowledge and human reason (aql) or philosophical knowledge. Prophets of God carry through revelation Divine messages, prophecies and laws, the three important constituents or elements of revelation. It is interesting to note that for knowledge based on human intellect the Quran never uses the term of reason or intellect (aql) directly rather it places high priority on thinking and contemplation. The primary interest of the Quran is to emphasise the act and process of knowing rather than the physical locus of knowledge. The processes of thinking and knowing in the Quran are conveyed by several verbs, such as aqila, faqiha, tafakkara, hasiba, zanna, itibara, tadbabara and hakima, all of which must originate in the sense perception. Thought in Islam should be grounded in facts or data, either from nature, man’s physical or psychological realities and the movements of History. Even in thinking and contemplating the unseen existence of God, for example, the Quran appeals to the human mind to reason from the basis of the natural, historical and physical environment.

Acquisition and dissemination of knowledge both, philosophical and prophetic, was emphasised in Islam right from its inception as is evident from a large number of the Quranic verses as well as traditions of the Prophet which are explicitly in praise and exhortation for the acquisition of knowledge and its propagation for the good of mankind. The Quran repeatedly invites man to use his senses and exercise his reasoning faculties and thereby reach the ultimate truth. It states that there is no limit to knowledge, that the whole universe is made for and is subservient to man, and that it can be conquered and made to serve the interest of mankind. The attitude of Islam towards knowledge, its attainment and dissemination among others is not only positive and emphatic rather, it is considered an ordained duty of all believers. It is for this reason that right from the early days of Islam a tradition to impart education had begun on a large scale and the tradition got strengthened with the passage of time and establishment of formal institutions of learning in Islamic societies. Interestingly, these attempts on acquisition of knowledge and its systematic dissemination did not see much discrimination between Islamic or prophetic sciences and rational and liberal or physical sciences for centuries together. In fact, on many occasions attempts to promote Islamic sciences at the cost and ignorance of the rational and physical sciences was heavily resented and opposed by Islamic scholars themselves. In the beginning of Islam, the knowledge as it converged from both the streams was taught in mosques which were the main centres of Islamic educational activities then, but later on madrasas were established where both, religious and philosophical subjects were taught and researched. These included the Quran, Hadith, Theology; Philosophy, Jurisprudence, Physical Sciences, etc.
7.9 COMMON FEATURES OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE OR CATEGORIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE, RELEVANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

We have discussed in detail the theory of knowledge, as it is in Islam and the classification of knowledge, etc in previous pages. The Islamic knowledge has following common features.

1. Domination by Islamic philosophy of knowledge. The medieval period saw the birth and rise of the Islamic philosophy of knowledge which was developed and promoted by Islamic or Muslim philosophers mainly drawn from West Asia and Central Asia. These philosophers were basically concerned with human happiness and its attainment, which comes through knowledge.

2. Influence of Greek Philosophers: The nature and concept of knowledge in medieval period was primarily influenced by the Greek philosophers particularly Plato and Aristotle and several others. Knowledge is the grasping of the immaterial forms, natures, essences or realities of things. Islamic philosophers agree that forms of things are either material (existing in matter) or immaterial (existing in themselves). While the latter can be known as such, the former cannot be known unless first detached from matter.

3. Two Basic Sources of Knowledge: There are two basic sources through which knowledge of the realities can be attained. One is the prophetic source wherein the method of revelation is used by the divine power. The other is philosophical process of understanding the universe, which is attained by following a rational process of observation, and experience of the material phenomena existing in the universe through the use of senses. The prophetic mode of receiving knowledge is very simple and easy. In this process, direct illumination is given by the Divine world to the human mind. For acquisition of this knowledge one need not take any action to receive the divinely given universals. However, it requires presence of a strong soul capable of receiving divinely knowledge. In the philosophical or rational source of knowledge, the number of unknown objects is reduced by moving from known objects of conception to unknown ones. The former follows a downward or prophetic way and the latter follows the upward or philosophical way.

4. The Quran and the Tradition of the Prophet or Sunna are the main sources of the prophetic knowledge, whereas the physical and material objects and experiences on earth and in the universe are the sources of rational or philosophical knowledge. The ultimate aim of both forms of knowledge is to help man know the ultimate reality, God, which lies in the Creator of man and the universe.

5. All Muslim philosophers believe that above the senses there is the rational soul which has two parts viz the practical and the theoretical intellect. The theoretical intellect is responsible for knowledge, whereas the practical intellect is meant for and concerns itself only with the proper management of the body through apprehension of particular things so that it can do the good and avoid the bad.

6. Islamic philosophy of knowledge encourages the believers and followers to acquire knowledge by continuously engaging their minds in various mental and intellectual processes. It divides knowledge into two broad categories of knowledge prophetic knowledge or Islamic sciences, and rational or liberal sciences. Man is encouraged to attain both forms of knowledge. Islamic scholars have discouraged imparting of knowledge of Islamic sciences by ignoring teaching and development of rational or philosophical sciences to its followers.
Islam lays more emphasis on knowledge than on worship and regards the learned superior to the devout. It enjoins every Muslim to seek and impart knowledge, not for its own sake but for a better living in this world and a more blissful and eternal life in the world hereafter.

7.10 SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACT OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE ON CONTEMPORARY AND PRESENT SYSTEM OF INDIAN EDUCATION

Islamic knowledge was revealed and introduced at a time and place when the people of an area in the Arab world were facing the height of superstition, ignorance and social and cultural degeneration. Islamic knowledge as revealed to/by the Prophet Mohammad in the form of the Quran and his own practices and sayings; as Prophet introduced the most useful corpus of knowledge to the mankind helped remove many social evils like social injustice, gender biases, socio-economic inequality of opportunity, unjust and inhuman treatment to the poor and the weak, superstition, immoral and unethical social practices, etc. Islamic knowledge created an awareness in the mankind of the rights of all human beings, social justice, cooperation and human discipline. It made them conscious of the purpose and mission for which they were created and their obligation to their Creator and the ultimate reality existing in One God. Islamic knowledge heavily emphasised the virtue of knowledge and the benefits of its acquisition and the significance and worth of its dissemination to all members of the human society. It encouraged and persistently stimulated people to acquire knowledge and continue to do so through their lives as it always benefits them both, in this world as well as hereafter. At the same time, it motivated the learner of every hue and level to disseminate and propagate knowledge as it is treated their most divine act. As it is treated their most divine act and as a result people solitary participated in this pious activity. Islam introduced an egalitarian approach to education and opened its doors for all sections and classes of the society and encouraged the better offs to take care of the education of the weak and did not discriminate against them in the pursuit of education. The injunction of the Prophet: “Let the poor and rich be equal before you in the acquisition of knowledge” had a wide spread impact on the provision of education and it is said that it had immediately led to the establishment of many scholarships in Cairo, Damascus and elsewhere at that time.

Islamic knowledge as contained primarily in the Quran and Sunna repeatedly encouraged and invited people to search for new knowledge which is scattered all around in God created earth and the universe, ponder over it, explore it, discover it and use the new knowledge of the rational sciences for their good as well as for the good of the humanity. As a consequence, many Muslim philosophers and scientists made their seminal contribution to the corpus of useful knowledge during the medieval period in secular sciences like physics, chemistry, astronomy, engineering, architecture, arts, etc.

In the medieval societies Islamic knowledge had been able to enrich their cultures and social processes and practices and was responsible for introduction of many lasting reforms in socio-political system, civil administration as well as in the economic sphere of life. It was able to introduce the concept and value of equality and social justice in economic and social life through the Quranic and prophetic injunctions.

An important impact of the development of Islamic philosophy and knowledge in the medieval world was the establishment of a well-defined education system in those societies which gradually took root and in most cases became a permanent part of the education system of those societies. The continued emphasis and attention on education by Islamic scholars led to the establishment of the madrassa education system for education of the masses as well as development of huge amount of literature and books useful for students, scholars, jurists, etc in those societies.
Knowledge in Education

The descendants of Muslim rulers on India in eleventh century brought with them their faith, language, culture, technology, crafts, trade, architecture, education system, administrative system, etc. and left an indelible mark on all these aspects of social, cultural, political and economic life of the people of India. The most prominent impact at that time was first seen in the establishment of an education system in many important cities of the country. In some of these cities many grand madrasas were also established at provincial, district and sub district levels. It is common knowledge that many of these madrasas were providing such a good quality education that students and scholars even from other parts of the world used to join these institutions frequently.

The curriculum offered in these madrasas included both religious sciences as well as secular sciences particularly. These included Quran, Hadith, Theology, Ecology, Logic (figh), Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry, Astronomy, etc. The education system during medieval period in Indian subcontinent comprised elementary schools and institutions of higher learning. Besides, a large number of maktabs were also opened in mosques for imparting primary education about Islami and language teaching.

Many madrasas especially during the period of Mughal rulers were thrown open for both Muslims and Hindus and both used to acquire excellent education in them and on its basis, used to get employment in the state administration. Right from the beginning of Islamic education in India, education of girls was paid a significant attention and some separate madrasas for girls were established. Even slaves under the early dynasties of Muslim rulers were provided equal opportunity of education and they used to be admitted in these institutions in large numbers. In fact, for about eight hundred years during the medieval period, the madrassa education system successfully provided educated and trained hands to all parts of administration, judiciary, economic institutions and all other institutions of the society. During the days of the Mughals particularly, the madrasas were also imparting training in various useful crafts and preparing craftsmen, besides producing other educated persons for the society.

However, this education system which remained in vogue in the country for many centuries was affected after the takeover of the power by the colonial rulers in nineteenth century for two important reasons. The British rulers had introduced the modern education system and its passouts were mostly accepted in the administrative set up of the time, and the court language was changed from Persian to English. Both these changes brought down the general relevance and significance of the traditional education institutions in the Indian society.

Moreover, due to loss of power and weakened economic strength of the Muslims the community support to madrasas came down drastically making the system weak and decay. However, despite all odds, the traditional education institutions, though on a limited scale, continued to impart Islamic knowledge to the children of the community even during the period of British rule. The madrassa education system regained some of its lost strength after independence. In the post independence period, the madrasa education system continued to grow, though very slowly, to serve the religious education needs of the community. During the last few decades, some of these institutions have also started imparting education in modern sciences along with the traditional sciences.

The entire madrassa education system meant to impart Islamic knowledge is, however, organised on a voluntary basis by the community itself. In fact, right from their inception these institutions have survived on paltry resources contributed by the community. Only the bigger and renowned ones used to receive monetary support from the landed aristocracy which too was stopped after the loss of political power.

Since the Constitution of India subscribes to the secular ethos and values, the state-sponsored education system, cannot as a rule allow imparting of religious education of any community in state-sponsored institutions. So Islamic education is not imparted in these institutions. However, the community has been granted liberty to establish such institutions to preserve its culture and language.
7.11. SOME MAJOR FEATURES AND STRENGTHS OF
ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE

The concept of knowledge in Islam occupies an important place and has been emphasised from the very first day of the launch of this religion. The first verse (sura Ale Imran) of the divine scripture of the Quran revealed on the Prophet begins with a focus on knowledge and learning only. The Islamic concept of knowledge is founded on five fundamental ideas: (i) the idea of one living, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, merciful yet just God; (ii) the idea of man's destiny as His servant and His vice regent on earth who is endowed with freedom coupled with responsibility and accountability; (iii) the idea of prophethood whose mission is to guide man for optimal realisation of his said destiny; (iv) the idea of multi-faceted reality and diversity of life which is a manifestation (ayat or Quranic verses) of God and which is intended to benefit man in his quest for a meaningful existence; and (v) the idea of final judgement on the day of destiny carrying reward and punishment for each human being.

This worldview obviously affects the Islamic concept and theory of knowledge and carries multiple implications for education. The concept of knowledge in Islam has the following key features:

(i) Knowledge is infinite as it originates and ends in the infinite Reality of God who is the absolute knower;
(ii) Since knowledge is an aspect of diversity, seeking it, expanding it and teaching it are important acts of divine worship;
(iii) Believers are encouraged to continuously explore, discover knowledge and conduct valuable researches in various sciences and enrich human civilisation with their intellectual achievements;
(iv) Proper and sincere application of knowledge in one's personal and collective life forms the foundation of human excellence in Islam;
(v) The concept of knowledge is an integrated one; whether it is found in the Quran, Sunna, in nature, history or in the inner experiences of man.
(vi) The teachings found in the two fundamental sources of the Quran and Sunna provide stability and paradigms to deal with all changes in human lives and environment.
(vii) At the same time, different inner experiences of man, history and natural phenomena provide avenues for a new interpretation of the teachings of these basic sources of Islam and thus man should be trained and prepared for the same.
(viii) This obviously requires a concept of life long never ending comprehensive process of education. Life long learning and research not merely as a professional obligation of a section of the community rather more importantly as a religious virtue for all is stressed.
(x) Since responsibility for education is an obligation of all Muslims, its opportunity theoretically and practically has to be open for all. This calls for democratisation of education which would only benefit Islam and mankind the most.
(x) Knowledge should not be regarded as an end in itself, rather it is a means to achieve something higher and more sublime. By making it a firm basis of the practical intellect throughout his life the believer should strive to achieve the goal of reaching the paradise in the world hereafter. On way, this practice will also bring peace and prosperity in this world as well.
Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.
   b) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of the unit.

4. What are the modes of communication of knowledge?

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5. What was the curricular focus in Madrassas?

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7.12 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we emphasized the following major points:

- Islamic concept of knowledge has both fundamental and liberal views. Fundamental view of knowledge is based on the knowledge of reality as contained in the Islamic scriptures of the Quran and Sunna or sayings and traditions of the Prophet and liberal view includes knowledge of reality existing in the physical universe around man.

- Human happiness in this world as well the life hereafter is entirely based on acquisition of knowledge of the reality which can be achieved by the application of intellectual tool of logic for a perfect understanding of the principles underlying the ultimate reality which originates and ends in God.

- There are two types of knowledge which is based on two major sources. These are prophetic knowledge and philosophical knowledge. Their sources are termed as prophetic source, based on divine revelation in the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet, and philosophic source based on rational processes of discovering knowledge followed by human mind. The former source leads to creation of prophetic knowledge and the latter to philosophical knowledge.

- The Islamic knowledge is meant for application in dealing with and solving various issues concerning mankind in general and the believers in particular. Ultimately the Islamic knowledge is functional to man’s positive cognitive – moral growth.

- Two main modes of communication of knowledge to the mankind are recognised. One is prophetic revelation to the prophet and through him knowledge is disseminated to the common people and the other one is the rational process of acquiring experience based on observation and experimentation through the means of senses. All Muslims are obliged to seek knowledge of all kinds as well as disseminate it to others.

- The Islamic concept of knowledge carried a widespread effect on the education process of societies of the world. It led to general awakening for education and research particularly in liberal sciences and made Muslim philosophers and scholars to contribute to the development of knowledge during medieval period.
An education system based on this philosophy of knowledge which was implemented through a well-organized curriculum, methodology of teaching learning and institutional set up of maktabs and madrassas flourished across the Islamic world during the medieval period.

In India, this educational philosophy and education system came with Muslim rulers in the eleventh century and saw the establishment of large numbers of educational institutions at different levels both for men and women, as well as for the ruling class and for the subjects. These educational institutions flourished until the onset of the colonial rule in the country.

During its presence, experiments in curriculum and methodology of teaching Islamic and liberal knowledge were carried out which gave birth to different forms of curriculum for Islamic education.

Islamic education, as it got implemented in the country, enriched the Indian culture, its value system, and also its languages and helped in improving literacy and indiscriminate access to education on a significant scale. The education system also brought some social changes in the Indian society and also led to reforms and growth in the economy.

At present, the Islamic education system operates in the country on a limited scale for a limited purpose of serving the community for meeting its religious education needs with a few exceptions of teaching in liberal science education.

7.13 UNIT-END ACTIVITY

1. Visit some madrassas in your locality and examine whether Islamic views about knowledge are reflected in curricular practices of madrassas.

7.14 POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the origin and basis of Islamic concept of education?
2. Discuss the relationship between the different sources and types of knowledge recognised by Islamic philosophers.
3. What are the primary and secondary objectives of Islamic education?
4. When and in what form Islamic education system was introduced in India? Trace its impact on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of life in India.
5. What is the present status of Islamic education in India?

7.15 SUGGESTED READINGS

7.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. According to fundamental view, knowledge is given by God through revelation i.e. the Quran is the fundamental and noblest knowledge. This is the knowledge that man may acquire and hold. But, according to liberal view, knowledge is acquired by following rational and systematic process of observation, reflection, discovery, etc.

2. i) The Quran
   ii) Sunna or Prophet's traditions
   iii) Systematic and rational observation, reflection and discovery of the reality.

3. Philosophical knowledge is based on man's interaction and experience of the physical reality existing in the universe or environment which comes to him, through his sensory system, in a highly logical manner. Prophetic knowledge consists of that knowledge which comes down to the human mind of a prophet through direct revelation, illumination or wahy descended on him by God.

4. There are two modes of communication of knowledge. These are prophetic and philosophical modes. The prophetic mode is based on revelation from God to his Prophet or to the mystics through the approach of mysticism. The philosophical mode is based on rational process of experience and observation by human intellect.

5. The curriculum offered in Madrassas included both religious as well as secular sciences. The subjects like Quran, Hadith, Theology, Ecology, Logie, Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry, Astronomy, etc. were included in the curriculum.