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Tradition of knowledge and research: role of the Islamic Research Institute

By:

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Acquisition knowledge was always a hallmark tradition of the human beings. First ever human on this planet was surely Hazrat Adam (A.S.) who was given distinction of knowledge by the Creator – Allah Almighty. There was a dialogue between Hazrat Adam and angels on that occasion in which angels were ordered by Allah Almighty to bow down in his honour that was due to knowledge which was given to Hazrat Adam (A.S.). The Holy Qur'an spoke on this issue very clearly.

The tradition of acquiring knowledge was always advanced by the coming generations of human being on this planet. The chain and cycle of this tradition came to its peak by the advent of last prophethood of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW). The first revelation of the Qur'an was an emphasis on knowledge. *Iqra* was first word given to the Holy Prophet Mohammad (SAW) which further highlighted the importance of knowledge for human beings.

The Muslims being the followers of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) always kept high the tradition of knowledge. In the special context of the sub-continent, they continued following the same spirit to the possible extent. However, they failed to achieve the required level of knowledge and subsequently they were defeated by foreign aggressors who were equipped with knowledge of their times.

The philosopher poet Allama Iqbal realized this and advised Muslims of the sub-continent to advance the tradition of knowledge during his famous sermon of Allahabad of 1930 in which he also proposed a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent.

The proposal of Allama Iqbal was widely appreciated and accepted by the Muslims of the sub-continent although he passed away in 1938. The caravan of Muslims continued its journey under the leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and in 1940 a resolution was adopted at the Lahore congregation of the All-India Muslim League in which the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims was made a common goal of all the Muslims of the sub-continent.

Just in seven years, creation of Pakistan was made possible by the solid stand and hard work of the Quaid-i-Azam and his followers. The Quaid-i-Azam in his various speeches affirmed in clear terms that the creation of Pakistan was with a purpose to present Islam to the contemporary world in a way to solve their problems. An objective resolution on this basis was adopted by the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in 1949. The resolution further affirmed that Islam shall be the official religion of the newly established state. Here again came the proposal of Allama Iqbal, which he presented in 1930. A member of the Constituent Assembly namely Chaudhry Muazzam Hussain Alias Zahiruddin Lal Mian from the then East Pakistan suggested establishment of a specialized research institute to guide the policy makers of Pakistan how to formulate laws in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah?

This was another milestone in the journey towards a research institute in question. Provision for the Institute was also laid down in the 1956 Constitution under article 197 but the Constitution was overruled by the Martial Law of 1958 by Ayub Khan. However, an organizing committee was formed by the Ministry of Education to establish the Institute in the same year.

Then comes Mach 10, 1960, when Statutory Notification No.F.15-1059-E-iv was issued establishing the Institute as "Central Institute of Islamic Research" which was later in 1962 confirmed as the "Islamic Research Institute" under article 207 of the Constitution.

The administrative control of the Islamic Research Institute was transferred to the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs under Notification No.F.24(23)/65-A of July 20, 1965.

The Institute was further transferred to the Ministry of Religious and Minority Affairs under Notification 1979 SRO 746(I)119 of August 22, 1979.

An Islamic University in the Federal Capital of Pakistan was established in 1980 under Ordinance, L III and Notification No.17(I)80. Pub., and the administrative control of the Institute was transferred to it.

Consequent upon the upgrading of the Islamic University to an International Islamic University by the Ordinance No. XXX of 1985, Notified under No.17(I)85. Pub., the Islamic Research Institute formally merged with the

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University. The Islamic Research Institute Council was reconstituted in 1987 with the President of the University as its Chairman.

The Institute was established to strengthen the ideological basis of the country. For a proper development of the Muslim society it was considered imperative that Islamic scholarship should engage itself in serious study and research in the fields of Qur'ānic Sciences, *Hadīth*, Islamic Law and Jurisprudence, History, Culture, Philosophy, *Tasawwuf* and various other Islamic subjects. It was important not only to review their development in the past but also to draw a blueprint for future development of Muslim thought so as to be able to meet the requirements of the contemporary Muslim society in a rapidly changing world.

In order to pursue its task systematically a Master Plan was chalked out in early stages of the Institute. According to that Master Plan, it was necessary to carry out an in-depth study of the basic sources of Islamic learning and of the classical works which represent Islamic thought, and to critically examine the important contributory factors in the development of Islamic society during the fourteen centuries of its history. The master plan has served as a basic document and a guideline for planning research in the Institute.

In the course of years the Institute has been called upon to assist the Muslim *ummah*, particularly the Government of Pakistan, in their effort to cast their institutions, especially their laws, into the Islamic mould. The Institute has, therefore, prepared and published books, translations, guidebooks and commentaries on Islamic legal texts for the use of lawyers, judges and decision makers.

Some of these studies have been made available in the form of summaries and reports to the Council of Islamic Ideology, to the parliament and to other departments of the Government of Pakistan. Most of these studies have, however, been published by the Institute in the form of books or articles in its journals for wider circulation.

In addition to its assistance and consultancy to national and international organizations in Pakistan and abroad, the Islamic Research Institute has been attempting to promote a moderate and responsible style of discourse on the issues concerning Islam and the challenges facing the Muslims. Its publications, seminars and conferences provide a forum for free expression of opinions, backed by research and based on a good knowledge of Islam, mainly from its primary sources. This provides for sober and scholarly review of differing viewpoints. It has gradually begun to be noticed by a section of the Pakistani society that the Institute has been promoting an Islamic discourse which rises above sectarian and other narrow considerations and presents a broad view of Islam. It is being increasingly acknowledged that this discourse is constructive and develops a tolerant mindset which is conducive to creating concord and harmony in the society.

Lately the Institute has developed an interest in several new areas of study. The new fields engaging its attention are Islam in South Asia, Comparative Religions and Islam and Science.

Foreign and Pakistani scholars regularly participate in conferences, seminars, workshops, exhibitions and extensive lectures that form an important part of the Institute's activities. A series of distinguished extensive lectures is currently on the anvil. The subcontinent already has an established tradition in this field, the best known being the Madras Lectures to which a galaxy of scholars have contributed. At least two major series will, Insha Allah, be started in the near future. These include the "Shah Wali Allah Distinguished Lectures on Islamic Thought" and "Mohammad Iqbal Distinguished Lectures on Islam and the Modern World".

Publishing is integral to the Institute's research activity. In addition to its quarterly research journals the Institute publishes books. Over the years it has published a galaxy of books in Urdu, Arabic, Persian and English. Urdu books are 82, Arabic 12, Persian 1, English 57. In addition to that it has published 97 research papers. These books and papers cover various subjects including Islamic Law, Jurisprudence, Economics, Political Science, Natural Sciences, History, Education, etc. Out of 281 rare manuscripts of traditional Islamic books available in the Institute's Library, more than a dozen manuscripts of classical significance have also been edited and published. Another ambitious project relates to the publication of the works of the Great Books of Islamic Civilization series. The series comprises one hundred significant and rare books of Islamic thought, culture and civilization, out of which nine have so far been published.

The books recently published by the Institute include *Muslims and the West: Encounter & Dialogue; Ideology of Pakistan; Searching for Solace; Muslim Understanding of Other Religions* and *The Socio-Political Thought of Shah Wali Allah*.

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The Institute has various Research Units engaged in research on its stipulated areas. They are: Fiqh and Law, Contemporary Islamic Thought, Qur'anic Studies, Hadith and Sunnah, Sirah, Classical Islamic Thought, Editing of the Manuscripts, Editing & Publishing Bureau.

The Research journals being published by the Institute are in English, Arabic and Urdu.

Islamic Studies, being published since 1962, ranks among the best-known and the oldest magazines on Islamics and has a world-wide readership. The journal, which has its links with scholars the world over, publishes research articles, comments and book reviews covering all fields of Islamic thought and learning and promotes a serious, sober and responsible discourse on Islam. Abstracted in *Science and Religion* and indexed in *Index Islamicus* and *Middle East Journal*, it not only concerns itself with the classical and modern perspectives of Islamic thought but also covers current developments and issues pertaining to Islam and Muslims. For the past several years the journal has been printing special issues devoted to particular themes. *Islamic Heritage in Spain*, *Islam in the Balkans* and *Islam & Science* have been hailed as landmark publications in this series. The latest to appear is the special issue on Jerusalem to which internationally-known scholars have contributed original articles, personal memoirs and poems. The journal has been published under the Editorship of leading scholars like A.S. Bazmi Ansari, Dr. Fazl-ur-Rehman, Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari and Dr. Muhammad Kahlid Masud.

Al-Dirasāt al-Islamiyyah, a refereed research journal, is being published since 1965. Mainly brought out to publish research articles, academic opinions and intellectual views of Pakistani scholars, it accommodates a wide spectrum of subjects and themes ranging from *Tafsīr, Aḥādīth, Fiqh, Uḥūl, Sīrah, Kalām*, philosophy, comparative religion, culture, history, social sciences, linguistics and literature to the current problems of the Muslim Ummah and its futuristic perspectives and prospects. Writers from outside Pakistan also contribute to the journal. Leading scholars of past and present have been editing this journal. They include: Ata Hussain, Maulana Abdul Rehman Soorti, Dr. Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi and Dr. Muhammad al-Ghazali (1987 till date).

Fikr-o-Nazar is being published since 1963. It is a research journal that covers all areas of Islamic studies and enjoys a good reputation among scholarly magazines in the Urdu language. From time to time the journal also brings out special issues on different themes. Leading scholar Professor Muhammad Sarwar was its pioneer editor, while other scholars like Maulana Abdul Qudoos Hashmi, Dr. Sharfuddin Islahi, Dr. Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi and Dr. Sahibzada Sajidur Rahman have been editing this journal. Leading column writer and orator Khurshid Ahmad Nadeem is its present Editor.

The Institute also publishes a quarterly newsletter in Urdu namely *Akhbar-i-Tahqiq*. It was started under the Editorship of Syed Muhammad Afzal Iqbal.

LIBRARY:

The Institute has a rich Library containing books on almost all topics and discipline with a special focus on Islamics. The Library was named after renowned scholar Dr. Mohammad Hamidullah who donated complete amount of the King Faisal Prize on Islamics given to him. So far the Library has a collection of about 183,000 books. In addition to this, it has 281 rare manuscripts of traditional Islamic books including oldest copies of the Holy Qur'an. The Library also receives galaxy of research magazines and journals from all over the world. These total 1100 in number. Dr. Mohammad Hamidullah Library has also a separate section on Sirah namely the National Sirah and Study Centre. The Library has also started digital service providing all facilities to the readers to access leading sources of the knowledge world over.

PRESS:

The Institute has its own printing press enabling it to print/publish books without any external support. Presently, the printing press has three printing machines with all relevant accessories.