

**AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF**  
**HUMANITIES AND ISLAMIC**  
**STUDIES RESEARCH**  
**(AJHISR)**

**Vol.1, Issue 1, Jul-15 to Dec-15**

**ISSN 2206-1010**



**AUSTRALIAN  
ISLAMIC LIBRARY**

*From darkness to light!*

# WELCOME,

We are highly excited to present the first issue of Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies Research. It has been my pleasure to serve as chief editor of AJHISR and contribute to its launch.

Following is a brief overview of our journal, its purpose and current issue.

## AJHISR AND ITS PURPOSE:

The Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies (AJHISR) is a multi-disciplinary, multi-lingual and open-access publication launched with an aim to encourage and facilitate original research in the field of Islamic Studies, Contemporary Muslim World, History, Educational philosophies and humanities in general. We accept papers in English and Urdu languages.

We are particularly interested in Exegesis, Hadith Studies, History, Arabic language, Islamic Education, Seerah, Comparative Religion, contemporary matters and other related research areas within the scope of 'Islamic studies and humanities'. The journal seeks to place Islam and the Islamic tradition as its central focus with regards to quality academic inquiry and to encourage comprehensive consideration of its many facets.

We aim to go a step ahead of other journals in terms of our commitment to nurture future researchers. In order to further this aim, we will be more than pleased to guide, assist and train young researchers and help them pave their way into this exciting field.

Research work, book reviews, thesis and other scholarly works can be submitted for review throughout the year. Each year, AJHISR has planned to launch two issues.

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## OVERVIEW OF CURRENT ISSUE:

(DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2076.1687)

This issue is filled with some excellent scholarly work from researchers around the globe. Journal starts with a paper dealing with Names and Attributes of Allah SWT presenting an examination of some atheistic claims.

Next paper analyses impact and usefulness of including local and international languages in the curriculum. A 4-language model is presented after a comprehensive literature review and analysis.

Islamic Education in Europe is explored in next paper. This detailed paper (80 pages) explores a wide range of aspects related to the availability of options for studying Islam in Europe at school level and analyses almost all European countries that have a Muslim-minority. This paper not only talks about existing situation but also presents a future sketch which can be highly beneficial for researchers and academics.

Social aspects within Muslim communities are also represented in this issue. Next paper discusses the matter of 'Dowry' and how it is impacting the less-fortunate from within our communities. The contemporary practice is found to be against the clear guidelines of Islam which puts the responsibility of paying a mutually agreed amount (or its equivalent) in dowry on grooms (contrary to existing practice where bride's family is burdened to pay excessive amounts or the equivalent).

Next paper presents a studious effort where the researcher has gathered 20+ verses from Quran which directly address the humanity in general, and not specifically Muslims. Explanation has been provided for each verse referencing famous Quranic exegesis.

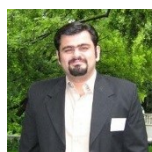
The last article examines legal, moral and religious aspects associated with book-digitization. This research established the benefits of book-scanning and digitization and why this approach to preserving books is inevitable in the current age of turmoils. A comparative analysis of various book digitization initiatives, from the giants like Google, is also provided.

*I would like to extend my gratitude to all researchers, reviewers and others who supported Australian Islamic Library in launching its research journal and presenting this issue.*

*We hope it comes out as a highly beneficial endeavour for the whole community.*

*Yours Sincerely,*

**Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf**



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*Chief Editor, AJHISR  
January 9, 2016*

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## NUMBERING PROTOCOL FOR JOURNAL ISSUES:

The following protocol is deployed for numbering journal issues:

### Volume:

A new volume is commenced each calendar year (For example, Vol1 contains article entries for 2015, Vol2 will contain entries for 2016 etc.)

### Issue:

Two issues shall be released each year with the basis of classification as follows:

1<sup>st</sup> Issue of the calendar year: Issue 1

2<sup>nd</sup> Issue of the year: Issue 2

Number of months included in each issue: 6

### Examples:

- Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies Research  
Vol. 1, Issue 1 (Jul-Dec 2015)  
*This is the only issue in this year and comprises of 6 months duration as per the protocol.*
- Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies Research  
Vol. 2, Issue 1 (Jan-Jun 2016)  
*2016 will be volume 2. Articles from first six months will be compiled under issue 1.*
- Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies Research  
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*Articles from second six months will be compiled under issue 2.*

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## **NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD FROM AN ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW**

Tauseef Ahmed

### **ABSTRACT:**

In this paper, various attributes of Allah are discussed from the perspective of Quranic guidance. Views of those who deny the existence of God or incorrectly interpret nature of Allah's attributes are discussed and critically analysed through rational evidence.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

"We will show them Our signs in the horizons (furthest heavens or universe) and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness? " [1]

The above verse can be divided into three parts:

1. Showing signs in the furthest heavens (universe)
2. Showing signs within their own selves
3. Allah is witness to all you do The showing of signs is used as a proof of the truth about Allah's existence and of Him being one.

Ibn Taymiyah has said that three are the key arguments which are used to proof the existence of God:

1. Verses that deal with natural phenomena
2. Argument from fitrah (innate human nature)
3. Kalam Cosmological argument

In this paper, the first two arguments will be considered.

### **1. VERSES THAT DEAL WITH NATURAL PHENOMENA**

And have you seen that [seed] which you sow?

Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower? [2]

And have you seen the water that you drink?

Is it you who brought it down from the clouds,

or is it We who bring it down? [3]

Allah is questioning the unbelievers in verses [63-64] and [68-69] (of chapter 56) with respect to seed and water. Does man have any control in these processes? The conclusion drawn from these ayahs are

1. The inability of man to grow seed and bring down water from the sky

2. The ability of Allah alone to cause the seed to grow or to bring water from sky So the ayah indicates Allah's sole ability in doing things which according to Ibn Taymiyyah is a sign pointing to the divine (Allah) directly.

Now there are also those people who even after witnessing such signs will not believe. Take for instance the story of Musa(as). He was given two signs:

1. The turning of his stick to snake
2. The light which came from his hand

The commentator Abdullah Yusuf Ali mentions in his commentary of verse 107 of chapter 7 (note no 1075):<sup>1</sup>

"The serpent played a large part in Egyptian mythology. The great sun-god Ra won a great victory over the serpent Apophis, typifying the victory of light over darkness. Many of their gods and goddesses took the forms of snakes to impress their foes with terror. Moses's rod as a type of a serpent at once appealed to the Egyptian mentality. The contempt which the Egyptians had entertained in their minds before was converted into terror. Here was someone who could control the reptile which their great god Ra himself had such difficulty in overcoming!"

He goes on to explain in 1076 "But the second Sign displayed by Moses was even more puzzling to the Egyptians, Moses drew out his hand from the folds of the garments on his breast, and it was white and shining as with divine light! This was to counter any suggestions of evil, which the serpent might have created. This was no work of evil - of black magic, or a trick or illusion. His hand was transfigured with a light which no Egyptian sorcerers could produce.

In Islam, the "white hand" of Moses has passed into a proverb, for a symbol of divine glory dazzling to the beholders." (Ali, 2000)

So from this, the denial of the second type is countered.

If one has still got doubts after seeing the empirical evidence in ayahs presented above (about rain, seed and water), then Allah's signs in the universe are plenty to observe and believe.

Sheik Jafar Idris mentions in his paper (Idris, 2012b):

"The final step towards rejecting God's existence was taken by Kant who said the laws of causation cannot be applied to anything outside our experience".

In his other paper (Idris, 2012a), he mentions that "the atheists considered the matter to be eternal. Their dream came to shatters when it was proven that universe had a beginning (according to big bang theory)" which Allah mentions in Al Quran[4]:

"Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together as one unit (monoblock or initial singularity) before we clove asunder"

From this verse, just like how the negative idea of the snake was proven wrong by the white hand; any negative ideas about God's existence will be proven wrong. Science agrees to this conception of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Then (Moses) threw his rod, and behold! it was a serpent, plain (for all to see)!" (Quran 7:107)

beginning of the universe which it found out only recently, whereas Quran mentioned it 1400 years ago. This very clearly goes in line with the verse:

"We shall show to them our signs in the furthest horizons"

## 2. SHOWING SIGNS WITHIN THEIR OWN-SELVES:

The concept of fitrah is discussed in this section. Prophet Muhammed صلى الله عليه وسلم is quoted to have said in an authentic Saheeh hadeeth:

"Every child is born in a state of fitrah (the natural state of man, i.e., Islam), then his parents make him into a Jew or a Christian or a Magian." (Agreed upon).

Dr Jafar Idris said in his paper (Idris, 2013): "Born with a natural capacity to be aware of the fact they are the servants of God, the sole creator, who alone needs to be worshiped" If people do not recognize by this way, their creator, Allah, then says "also within their own selves" - meaning people will undergo personal experiences from which they recognize their creator.

Consider the case with Umar (R.A.). It has been reported that he once came to Kaaba for Tawaf at night and found prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم reciting the Quran. The words appealed to him, but he was struck by a negative thought according to which these were the words of a soothsayer magician. Then the prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم recited the verses which said this is neither the word of soothsayer nor a magician. He was astonished by the fact that very thought which occurred in his mind, the Quran gave its reply immediately. Then he wondered what this will be all about. It was said that this is the word of an honoured messenger. Every human being goes through various stages in his life till the message becomes clear that Allah is one.

## 3. ALLAH IS WITNESS TO ALL THAT YOU DO

Allah being the witness is one of the attribute of God which according to Dr Jafar Idris is the greatest proof about the existence of the divine. No philosopher or scientist or any religious book can explain God's attributes in the way God does himself in Quran or what the prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم explained through the blessed Sunnah. Through this explanation of Allah's attributes, one knows who Allah is. Him being the loving creator can be felt from the sweetness of his attribute, AlWadood. Him being most merciful can be known through his attributes, ArRahman (merciful) and Ar-Raheem (most merciful). How can God's attributes be known: Dr. Jafar Idris further goes on to explain in his paper (Idris, 2012b)

"The attributes can be known through two sources

- i. Reason
- ii. Revelation

i. Through reason the following attributes can be known:

- If He creates then he is the creator and his nature is different from His creation
- He is uncreated or uncaused or eternal (no beginning) whereas His creation is created (has a beginning)
- He is all powerful because there are 10 to power 80 atoms in the universe. To create and separate each one of them, one will need a tremendous amount of energy. He created the universe based on His choice so He must have a will.

- He must be all knowing for in order to create, He must be knowing - He must be self-sufficient for He is not dependent on anything to create
- What logically implies He must have no end ii. Through revelation, most of His attributes are made known to us, e.g. hearing, seeing, loving, being most merciful, a guide to the straight path and other attributes.

### Three schools of thought about interpretation of God's attributes:

Three school of thought have existed when it comes to interpretation of God's attributes

- i. Anthropomorphists
- ii. Negators
- iii. Affirmers

i. The anthropomorphists are those who liken God to his creation. They do the humanistic interpretation of attributes. They say God's seeing is similar to our seeing, His hearing is similar to our hearing etc. They fail to understand the fact which Allah mentions in the verse

"There is nothing like him".

Based on this verse, any humanisation of God's attributes is countered.<sup>2</sup>

They are condemned as polytheists.

ii. Negators are those who based on the verse "there is nothing like him" negate the attributes which Allah which He Himself has mentioned about Him. Some go so far that they start comparing him to non-existents when asked a question "Does God exist". They say by saying He exists you are comparing him to existents. Nothing can be said about him in a positive or negative. The fact of the matter is that God is a living existent who like all existents. He has His attributes of seeing, hearing etc. A particular set of attributes when applied to the creator, takes a different tone as compared to when this is applied to human beings.

It can be understood more clearly with an analogy. An attribute (e.g. swimming, breathing etc.) applied to humans is different from when the same attribute is applied to other beings such as fishes or animals. Same way attributes like hearing, seeing, loving etc. can take place in a different way when applied to God as compared to when they are applied to a human being.

iii. Affirmers are those who affirm what God has affirmed about himself in the Quran or what the prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said about Him in the Sunnah. The first step is to affirm and then believe that there is nothing like him. By doing so, the extremist position of above two schools of thought is avoided. This is the understanding of the salaf and the first three generations.

Some negators would say that the words in revelations are used in their metaphorical and not in their real sense. For example, when it is said in the Qur'an of God that He sees or hears, what is meant is that He knows, because seeing and hearing in their real senses apply to animals only. This leads us to a milder version of negationism.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of this belief can be seen in many deviant sects and religions where God is considered to be in the form of human beings or animals. Followers of such concept personify God with human traits such as eating, marrying or having a child.

Propounders of this milder version are ready to attribute to God things like existence, knowledge, life, power, will, seeing and hearing in their real sense, but would take as metaphorical attributes such as love, pleasure, anger and hate. Next paragraph explains the belief of such negators.

There are sects who affirm only 7 or 8 names of Allah. This comes under minor forms of negation. Ibn Taymiyah in his book 'Aqeedah Tadmuriya' (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2000) criticizes that just like they affirm 7 or 8 attributes and then say that there is nothing like him, the same can be said about God's other attributes".

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[2] Al-Quran ch 56 verse no[63-64]

[3] Al-Quran ch 56 verse no[68-69]

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## WHAT LANGUAGES TO INCLUDE IN CURRICULUM FOR MUSLIM CHILDREN

Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf (*Revised on 30-Nov-15*)

### ABSTRACT:

Languages are tools that connect people globally and help them acquire knowledge. It is a highly critical decision to choose a language or a set of languages for inclusion in the curriculum in a manner that would be most productive at personal, community and national level. What we need to see in our next generation has to be 'sowed the seeds for' today. Our study presents an overview of choices related to languages inclusion in the curriculum for Muslim children from the perspective of acquiring *local languages, Arabic, English and other international languages*. Findings suggest that learning this set comprising of 4 languages is already practiced in different cultures and institutions. However selection of languages to be included in mix needs be carefully considered. The paper also highlights factors that govern influence of a particular language globally or for communities and recommend a set of languages that can be adopted for curriculum with further research.

### INTRODUCTION:

Children learn languages the most in their early childhood ("Language development," 2015). Accordingly, the language they obtain the first is the language of people they live with, in most cases, their parents. However, due to social circumstances, they may need to learn other languages as well, as they move ahead in life and develop certain motives. While acquiring the second language, maintaining a native language is found to be highly beneficial in terms of cognitive, social, psychological and academic aspects (IDRA, 2000; Sue Fernandez, 2007). This paper will discuss some factors that can affect the choice of languages that can be included in the curriculum for Muslim children, formally or informally, to achieve relevant motives and intended outcomes.

### DECISION TO LEARN OTHER LANGUAGES:

Whether or not other languages get selected for study depends on 'usefulness' of learning those languages to learners:

"When the numerous variables and viewpoints are considered, USEFULNESS emerges as the most important factor in predicting whether a choice of literacy instruction medium will be successful. The perception of the usefulness may be different, however: useful for national unity and technological progress, as seen from a top-down perspective; or useful for reading and writing in one's daily life and for job opportunities, as seen from a bottom-up perspective" (Baker, 1996)

'Usefulness' depends on 'purpose' or 'motive' for which language may be studied. The motivational factors for learning languages other than the local language are classified as follows (Merritt, 2013):

a. Integrative motivation:

Learners who study a language with the aim of 'better understanding a culture, language, and society' are integratively motivated. Linguistic studies show that integrative motivation yields faster and more effective language learning results than other types. Learners from

multilingual nations can be integratively motivated to learn their national languages as a way of connecting with their countrymen: English and French in Canada; German, French and Italian in Switzerland; Hindi and regional languages in India, Pushto, Punjabi and Urdu in Pakistan etc.

b. Instrumental motivation:

Learners who study a foreign language in order to achieve another goal (as compared to above) are instrumentally motivated. In these cases, language competence isn't the goal in itself, but rather the vehicle to achieving a separate professional or personal accomplishment.

Considering the context of Muslim students, both types of motivation would be required. They need to integrate more effectively with societies and people of countries they live in (integrative motivation). This intention and competence achieved in languages because of this can be used for a variety of productive purposes. Similarly, Muslim children also need to have instrumental motivation in order to understand religious literature in Arabic and gain spiritual uplift by referring to the very sources of Islam i.e. Quran and Sunnah.

Following is further explanation of relevant aspects in line with these motivational factors.

**IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING LOCAL AND NATIONAL LANGUAGE(S):**

It is extremely important to learn the language of the area we live in. Not having proficiency in local language would definitely hinder integration with broader community and stir confusions and misunderstandings as pointed out by Musharraf (2015) while discussing the lack of availability of teachers in Europe who can deliver Islamic education in schools using local languages. The point is further highlighted by the recent criticism, such as in the case of a prominent community leader in Australia who required an interpreter to address the media ("Mufti 'translation' under fire," 2015). If this lack of language skill persists, 'us' vs 'them' mindset would continue to prevail stirring division within communities and racism. As explained above, this should not be at the expense of learning native or other desired languages. Most governments also encourage children to learn multiple languages in line with perceived benefits of this approach (O'Regan, 2014, 2014; Sue Fernandez, 2007).

**IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING ARABIC:**

"Allah, the Almighty and Wise, chose and singled out Arabic from amongst all the languages of the world - past, present and future - to be the vehicle for His final Revelation to the whole of humanity. This fact alone should constitute sufficient reason for Muslims to learn Arabic" ("Ten Reasons Why Muslims Should Learn Arabic," 2014).

Muslims believe in Quran's *Aijaz* (distinguished and miraculous nature) in terms of its meaning and spiritual uplift it provides. Arabic is considered to be the most comprehensive language (Ad-Dausaree, 2006) in terms of depth and width of words and meanings. Judah Ibn Tibbon, who is known as 'father of translators' for his works in Arabic-to-Hebrew translation (Jewish Virtual Library, 2002; Sela, 2003, p. 140), explains the high status of Arabic by mentioning it as "in fact the most comprehensive language, full of resources concerning every subject. It satisfies the necessities of all

those who speak or write this language. Its expressions are exact and clear, and it reaches to the heart of all questions, much more than it is possible with Hebrew” (Sela, 2003, pp. 140–141).

If Muslims need to understand the word of Allah in a better way, they need to understand Arabic. If next generation of Muslims doesn't know about Arabic and can't read literature in Arabic, they will not be able to refer to the huge body of Islamic literature which is written in Arabic, including classical texts which form basis of interpretation for matters related to Quran Exegesis, Hadith, Fiqh and other branches of Islamic knowledge. Translation can often not convey the same meaning as original text (Ngo, 2011), it at all available.

“Muslims holds the importance of Arabic language in very high esteem with most of their beliefs being inseparable from Arabic” (“ Importance of Arabic,” 2013). Most Muslims use Arabic in their personal and spiritual lives in some capacity. Some use it for daily prayers and supplications and understanding Quran, whereas others need it for communication within their communities (Esposito, 2002; Reem, 2009).

In accordance with above points, there is no doubt about the place of Arabic language in curriculum taught to Muslim children. In our opinion, all Muslim children should at least be taught enough Arabic language to enable them to understand the meaning of Quran and what they say in praying while delivering those words from their tongues.

We see variation in the level of focus on the Arabic language if we look at curricula taught to Muslim children. In some places, it is taught as a core subject [e.g. in Madaris Al-Islamia (Moosa, 2015) or in Middle-Eastern schools], whereas in others it covers only the basic level information. We also see some secular institutions in the Muslim world which do not cover the Arabic language at all. Many parents choose private teaching options for Arabic reading and/or writing (Musharraf, 2015).

#### **LEARNING OTHER LANGUAGES AND PLACE OF ENGLISH IN CURRICULUM:**

The Islamic Golden age was filled with great achievements from Muslims in terms of discoveries, innovations, and inventions which form the basis of some the most sophisticated present-day organizations, processes, and technologies. The beginning of this golden age can be attributed to the mass-translation effort led by Muslim caliphs who brought in a huge amount of literature from other languages to Arabic. This massive pool of information and knowledge from various sources was not available to any other single language-speaking source or group at their own. Muslims accordingly were able to integrate this literature and build further on that to progress with their scientific and intellectual discoveries (Ahmed, 2011; Al-Khalili, 2010).

Arabic remained the official language of Muslims for centuries. But this is, unfortunately, not the case anymore. Muslims neither have such literature available in Arabic anymore nor do all the Muslims speak Arabic. In fact, research shows that recent translations into and out of Arabic language have been fewer than other languages in terms of its native speakers (Erard, 2014). The low volume of translations into Arabic has been identified as an obstacle to the dissemination of outside knowledge into the Arab world (Baer, 2014) and vice versa.

In such a situation, there are three options for Muslims to regain access to broader international literature:

- Learn a language, spread over wide geographical areas, that has a high global-following and understanding from masses, to use as a tool to access literature in that language
- Learn sufficient level of Arabic across the board, in all Muslim communities around the globe and re-start mass-translation effort
- Learn local languages as well as selected global languages so that literary works and literature can be mutually translated to increase wider availability.

Adding Arabic to the third option would further increase its vitality.

In our opinion, the third option is a quick way of enabling required outcomes. However, identification of a suitable language that can be considered 'global' in contemporary times is a matter that needs careful observation and data analysis.

Languages vary enormously in 'global importance' because of historical, demographic, political, and technological forces (Ronen et al., 2014). It is argued: "The influence of any language is a combination of three main things: the number of countries using it as their first language or mother tongue, the number of countries adopting it as their official language, and the number of countries teaching it as their foreign language of choice in schools. The intrinsic structural qualities of a language, the size of its vocabulary, the quality of its literature throughout history, and its association with great cultures or religions, are all important factors in the popularity of any language. But, at base, history shows us that a language becomes a global language mainly due to the political power of its native speakers, and the economic power with which it is able to maintain and expand its position".(Luke Mastin, 2011)

When we look at the figures, with no oversight to a factor of geographical spread, we see English as being the most influential language (Pegg, 2012). "On almost any basis, English is the nearest thing there has ever been to a global language. Its worldwide reach is much greater than anything achieved historically by Latin or French, and there has never been a language as widely spoken as English. Many would reasonably claim that, in the fields of business, academics, science, computing, education, transportation, politics and entertainment, English is already established as the de facto lingua franca" (Luke Mastin, 2011). Another research from MIT reveals: "English has the most transmissions to and from other languages and is the most central hub" (Erard, 2014).

It is to be noted that, by recommending utilization of English as a 'global' language, we are not at all recommending not studying or not focussing on other languages, including native/ local languages and Arabic. In fact the notion that "English is enough" is found by the researcher to be very weak (Sue Fernandez, 2007). If we confine ourselves to English alone, we may not be able to reach broader global population.

According to our study, the most useful combination, while keeping geographical spread in consideration, can be [ENGLISH]-[ARABIC]-[FRENCH or SPANISH] in combination with local language(s).

Following graphics from Pegg (2012) further clarify this opinion by explaining the geographic concentration of Arabic, Spanish, French and English languages. We can see that most parts of the world are well covered by these four languages.



Figure 1 Arabic



Figure 2 French

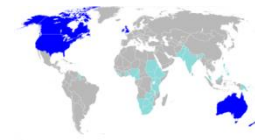


Figure 3 English



Figure 4 Spanish

However, above figures also reveal that even learning ONLY these three languages would not ensure a complete global outreach. To fill this gap, learning of local languages should remain a priority. Some of the biggest local languages are Mandarin, Russian, Hindi, and Portuguese. In this mix of proposed 4-language learning option, Persian cannot be included due to its following concentrated in a smaller number of countries. It would accordingly be classified as 'local' language. For the purposes of this study, local languages are those which concentrated in certain areas and do not have a geographically spread out following<sup>1</sup>.

As a case study, let us consider the example of Pakistan.

The two prominent languages taught in most government and private schools are Urdu and English. Arabic and local languages are taught in some instances but not with a great deal of zeal and enthusiasm. Language proficiency for most students is accordingly restricted to these two languages except in the case of 'spoken' proficiency depending on the language spoken at home.

In *Madaris* (traditional religious education institutions), we see **ARABIC-ENGLISH-URDU-PERSIAN** combination. English, in most cases, is not taught at the reasonable level of detail or to a standard where students can easily read/ write literature and engage in effective conversations. The focus accordingly is more on Arabic and Persian. While, we recommend maintaining focus on Arabic language, the inclusion of Persian in curriculum needs to be re-evaluated through further research.

In line with above graphs and discussion, a possible combination that needs to be assessed for usability in religious institutions can be: **[ARABIC]-[ENGLISH]-[LOCAL LANGUAGE]-[FRENCH or FRENCH]**. Local language, depending on geographical location, can accordingly be Urdu, Mandarin, Hindi, Bengali, Persian or other national languages that have large following.

Another important point to note here is the fact that children can become fluent in multiple languages if introduced at an early age without much struggle (O'Regan, 2014). This further highlights the importance of adding the second language(s) in curriculum from early stages rather than leaving it to higher grades or adulthood.

#### **Situations when language other than these can be recommended for Inclusion in curriculum:**

If communication with the special foreign community is required for a particular purpose, that language should be included in the curriculum. For example, in some European countries such as Greece, many parents want their children to learn Turkish. Similarly, we have come to know about cases where some *dua't* (callers to Islam or Islamic missionaries) have learnt specific languages to convey the message of Islam to certain communities.

#### **CONCLUSIONS:**

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<sup>1</sup> This point is further clarified in Appendix 1 of Vol1, Issue 1 for AJHISR (Jul-Dec 15)

With this, we conclude that Muslims around the world can increase their access to international and their own religious literature by learning English and Arabic languages. Learning local languages shall remain a high priority too as in the absence of it, integration and adjustment within communities is highly improbable and often leads to disintegration. Considering the existing 4 language model adopted in religious institutions, it is considered useful to explore the possibility of changing the languages included in curriculum based on their international relevant and influence. Right decision in the regard will govern what our next generation will be able to access, refer to, learn and disseminate.

Refer to Appendix 1 for related graphics on size of

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## ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN EUROPE – A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf

### ABSTRACT:

With the growing Muslim population in Europe and recent influx of migrants, it is vital to analyze schooling options available to Muslim parents in terms of Islamic studies in the public and private sector. This research will accordingly help Muslim community and governments to plan their way forward in a number of ways such as teacher training, curriculum design, operating private schools and other aspects. In current study, we have analyzed a large body of academic research, news, and opinions of various community members. Our findings from this explorative research, identify a number of differences from country to country. Some countries consider confessional education where as other provide it in a non-confessional manner. Some have complete separation between Church and state whereas others are heavily influenced by Church and accordingly reflect this in their educational policies. We also find out that financial situation of Muslim communities is generally not very strong and they are reliant on foreign funding to meet their basic religious needs e.g. having a place of worship or a mosque. Most of this support is found to be coming from Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Our findings also highlight the importance of Sunday or weekend schools as most of the communities where adequate confessional Islamic knowledge is not available through public education system and Islamic schools cannot be established, they are helping the communities in imparting religious knowledge they consider important for their children.

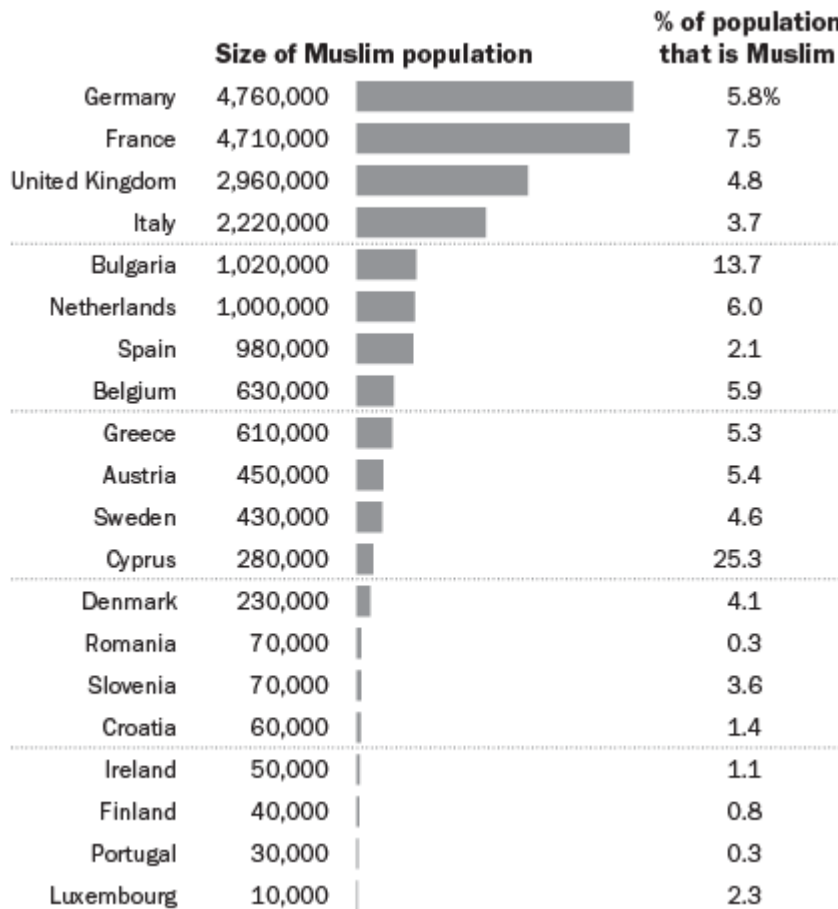
**Keywords:** *Islamic school, Religious studies, Religion in Schools, Islamic education, Islamic Studies*

### INTRODUCTION

The Muslim population in Europe is gradually increasing (2% between 1990 to 2010). According to predicted figures for 2050, Christianity is expected to maintain its biggest religious following in Europe (65.%), however, the Muslim population is expected to almost double and reach 10.2% (Hackett, 2015). With increasing Muslim population, we can expect increased percentage of parents looking forward to the religious education of their children. It is, therefore, important to have a fresh look at

Islamic education options available to Muslim parents in Europe and analyze them from the point of view of relevant government policies.

In this paper, we have referred to previous research, news and opinions of community members to interpret and analyze European education system from the point of religious education, in particular, Islamic studies.



*Figure 1: Muslim Population in Europe*

*Source: PEW Templeton Global Religious Future Project*

*(Hackett, 2015)*

*Projection regarding religious following show an increase in Islamic population and unaffiliated:*

	2010 ESTIMATED POPULATION	% IN 2010	2050 PROJECTED POPULATION	% IN 2050
Christians	553,280,000	74.5%	454,090,000	65.2%
Unaffiliated	139,890,000	18.8	162,320,000	23.3
Muslims	43,470,000	5.9	70,870,000	10.2
Jews	1,420,000	0.2	1,200,000	0.2
Hindus	1,380,000	0.2	2,660,000	0.4
Buddhists	1,350,000	0.2	2,490,000	0.4
Other Religions	890,000	0.1	1,100,000	0.2
Folk Religions	870,000	0.1	1,590,000	0.2
<b>Regional total</b>	<b>742,550,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>696,330,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Table 1: Projection about size of religious groups in Europe*

*(Masci, 2015)*

With these changing demographics and specific educational policies adopted by countries regarding religious education and values being taught to pupils at schools, standardized education programs in Islam are being considered across nearly all of Europe in various shapes and forms.

This requirement is currently being addressed through policies that reflect the unique political and cultural contexts currently surrounding Islam in each nation.

While some countries make room for state-regulated Islamic programs alongside Christian, Catholic, and other religious education programs in public school settings, others opt instead to support private Islamic institutions in varying political and financial capacities. On the other hand, there are some states which keep religion and state completely separate.

In addition to requirements and policies surrounding curricula, many EU states have specific requirements with regards to teachers' qualification. Islamic education and Arabic language teaching, accordingly, are no exclusion and teachers are required to hold qualifications in line with state requirements.

Therefore, university programs for the training of imams and Islamic teachers have also become necessary to support country-specific policy requirements. The diverse policies and levels of political and public support for Islamic education and Imam training programs have resulted in varying degrees of effectively meeting this need.

#### RESEARCH BENEFITS:

- Findings from this report can become a tool for **strategizing future schooling options** for Muslim children and allow governments, parents, Muslim organizations and communities to do comparative analysis and plan for their future goals. It may particularly be useful for private Islamic schools that operate internationally or plan to expand internationally.
- EU governments, with this report and other studies similar to this, can benchmark their policies against each other and accordingly plan the way forward on their religious education policies.
- Examining each individual country's approach to Islamic education in Europe is an important dimension of case-by-case integration analyzes. Looking at Islamic education as a transversal issue can also open broader discussions around the identity transformations experienced by both Muslims and secular host societies as a result of the Western-Islamic encounter.
- When we analyze previous research on this topic, we identify that they are either written for a specific country or for a selected number of countries and hence, do not provide a holistic view of the status of Islamic Education in Europe. Most of such research is focused on religious education in general and not specifically Islamic education. Some researchers have tried to compile articles and papers on Islamic education in Europe. Though it compiles into a highly beneficial resource, cohesion between these individual pieces remains an area for improvement. Our current research is an effort to bridge this gap and present a well-integrated, cohesive and holistic picture of Islamic educational opportunities in Europe in line with relevant educational policies.

#### METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION:

- Previous research, news reports and secondary data collection of community opinions are done to explore current situation

- Countries with higher Muslim percentages are discussed first. We see quite a variation in the presence of Muslims across Europe which heavily influences the education policies relating to Islamic studies and choices available to Muslim parent.
- Religious education option in public schools has been discussed as most Muslim children attend public schools.
- We have also discussed private Islamic educational institutions, which operate due to a number of reasons such as unavailability of Islamic education in schools or not being enough, availability or unavailability of financing options, provision by Government to allow Islamic schools etc. These factors generally link to the level of public and political support provided for Islam in public school systems and legislative provisions. Where they exist, the accessibility of government funding, state regulation of curriculums, curriculum content, and the official value of diplomas and degrees has been reviewed in line with available information.

#### **LIMITATIONS**

- Educational policies in European countries are changing rapidly. While researching relevant policy and gathering information for this book, we came across a number of proposed changes in pipelines with some being planned for implementation in near future. For some countries, information will be required to be updated in a revision of this book.
- In some countries, policy and constitution allow certain provisions which are not tested or implemented as yet due to lack of demand. When it comes to practical implementation, adherence to the constitution and its interpretation may vary from country to country.

#### **FINDINGS SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **FINDINGS SUMMARY**

- The predominant religion in Europe is Christianity which also impacts the educational system. Often states have official churches or church affiliations which strongly impact their educational policy. However, there is an increasing secularization in many countries.

- Islamic Schools can be opened in almost all European countries studied under our research barring Northern Cyprus and Slovakia. In Slovakia, it is due to the fact that Muslims are not registered as a community. It should be noted that in some countries, there are certain conditions and specific requirements from a state that need to be fulfilled in order to run Islamic schools. Whereas in others, religious organizations are given a free hand in terms of religious teaching in Islamic schools.
- Islamic Education can be taught public schools in almost half the countries. However, there are mixed opinions among Muslim parents about its effectiveness.
- Religion in some shape or form, either as a separate subject or as a part of the broader history of ethics course, is taught in almost all countries except Hungary. One of the common forms of teaching is non-confessional subject in religion which discusses various faiths. This type of approach can be a 'make' or 'break' situation for adherence to faith as pointed out by Atheist scientist and cosmologist Lawrence Krauss while discussing the teaching of religion in schools "Change is always one generation away... so if we can plant the seeds of doubt in our children, religion will go away in a generation, or at least largely go away. And that's what I think we have an obligation to do". He further continued "What we need to do is present comparative religion as a bunch of interesting historical anecdotes, and show the silly reasons why they did what they did" (Haq, 2014; Brown, 2014; DOLAN, 2014).
- In most countries, religious education is offered as an optional subject. Many of the countries which have it as a mandatory subject allow a non-confessional generic subject on Ethics to be selected.
- Generally, governments work with religious organizations in the delivery of religious instruction and in many cases they can also appoint teachers.
- Different governments have different requirements regarding who can teach in schools. Relevant teaching qualifications are generally required.

	<b>Religion taught in Public schools</b>	<b>Islamic education can be taught in public schools</b>	<b>Confessional or non-confessional</b>	<b>Alternate course on 'Ethics'</b>	<b>Opt out option available from religion and ethics class</b>	<b>Private Islamic School allowed to be opened</b>	<b>Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools</b>
Germany	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Varies from state to state	Varies from state to state	Yes	Yes
France	Only in secondary schools (however no Muslim chaplains are known to conduct such classes)	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes

	<b>Religion taught in Public schools</b>	<b>Islamic education can be taught in public schools</b>	<b>Confessional or non- confessional</b>	<b>Alternate course on 'Ethics'</b>	<b>Opt out option available from religion and ethics class</b>	<b>Private Islamic School allowed to be opened</b>	<b>Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools</b>
United Kingdom	Yes	No	Non-confessional	No (RE is mandatory)	Yes	Yes	Only supplementary education institutes (e.g. weekend and Sunday school)
Italy	Yes	No	Confessional	Yes (General Mythology or secular e.g. Music etc.)	Yes	Yes	No
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	Non-confessional (Various religions are taught through	Options available in secondary schools (e.g. 'Philosophy',	Yes	Yes	No (Dependence is heavily on foreign funding e.g. DIYANET of

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
			one faith may be dominant in teaching)	'World Religions' etc.)			Turkey)
Netherlands	Yes (On request from parents)	Yes	Non-confessional (General focus is world religions)	No (as religion is not a mandatory subject)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spain	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Alternate study activities OR a course on the history of religions.	Yes	Yes	Yes

	<b>Religion taught in Public schools</b>	<b>Islamic education can be taught in public schools</b>	<b>Confessional or non- confessional</b>	<b>Alternate course on 'Ethics'</b>	<b>Opt out option available from religion and ethics class</b>	<b>Private Islamic School allowed to be opened</b>	<b>Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools</b>
Belgium	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greece	Yes	Yes (Government Established minority schools in line with international agreement)	Confessional	Yes (Pupils can opt out of Greek Orthodox education in public schools)	Yes (i.e. choice of not sending pupils to Islamic schools)	Yes	No
Austria	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	<b>Religion taught in Public schools</b>	<b>Islamic education can be taught in public schools</b>	<b>Confessional or non-confessional</b>	<b>Alternate course on 'Ethics'</b>	<b>Opt out option available from religion and ethics class</b>	<b>Private Islamic School allowed to be opened</b>	<b>Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools</b>
Sweden	Yes	No	Non-confessional	No	No	Yes	Yes
Cyprus (Northern)	Yes	Yes (only in primary schools)	Partly Confessional in primary; Non-confessional in secondary	Yes	Yes	No (religious education cannot be provided by anyone other than state - including after-school or informal classes)	N/A
Switzerland	Yes (In some canton, RE is not taught)	Yes (variation from canton to canton –	Confessional as well as non-confessional (canton to		Yes (variation from canton to canton – in some, it is	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
		Limited availability)	canton variation)		mandatory)		
Denmark	Yes	No	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Norway	Yes	No	Non-Confessional	Part of course on RE (No separate course)	Yes (but very limited and partial)	Yes	Yes
Romania	Yes	Yes (Registered religious organizations	Confessional	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
		can deliver, including Muslims)					
Slovenia	Yes	No	Non-confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Croatia	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	<b>Religion taught in Public schools</b>	<b>Islamic education can be taught in public schools</b>	<b>Confessional or non-confessional</b>	<b>Alternate course on 'Ethics'</b>	<b>Opt out option available from religion and ethics class</b>	<b>Private Islamic School allowed to be opened</b>	<b>Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools</b>
Ireland	Yes	Yes (limited availability; 90% of schools are catholic leaving limited choice for parents)	Confessional	Parents can send their children to non-dominion schools. However, only 41 out of approximately 3171 primary schools in the country are multi-denominational in ethos.	Yes	Yes (See section on Ireland: Public schools are privately run as per Irish education system)	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
Finland	Yes	Yes	Non-Confessional	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Portugal	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (Tax Exemptions depending on family income)
Luxembourg	Yes		Confessional	Generalized courses are required to be provided according to constitution	No	Yes	Yes

	<b>Religion taught in Public schools</b>	<b>Islamic education can be taught in public schools</b>	<b>Confessional or non- confessional</b>	<b>Alternate course on 'Ethics'</b>	<b>Opt out option available from religion and ethics class</b>	<b>Private Islamic School allowed to be opened</b>	<b>Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools</b>
Czech	Yes	No	Both (Read section on Czech for more details)	Offered as integrated curricula (mandatory subjects)	Yes (only for confessional RE which is an optional subject)	Yes	Yes
Estonia	Yes	No (No provisions in state curriculum)	Non- Confessional	No	Yes	Yes	
Slovakia	Yes	No (Muslims are not registered as recognized religious	Confessional	Yes	No	No (Muslims are not registered as recognized religious community)	No (only Church schools are subsidized)

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
		community)					
Poland	Yes	Yes	Confessional	Yes (Limited availability)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hungary	No (only space can be provided at public facilities under specific conditions)	Yes (but not as part of regular curriculum or through state funds)	Confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	<b>Religion taught in Public schools</b>	<b>Islamic education can be taught in public schools</b>	<b>Confessional or non- confessional</b>	<b>Alternate course on 'Ethics'</b>	<b>Opt out option available from religion and ethics class</b>	<b>Private Islamic School allowed to be opened</b>	<b>Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools</b>
Latvia	Yes	No	Non- confessional	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	Confessional (Offered only if specifically requested)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Iceland	Yes	No	Non- confessional (but highly tilted towards Christianity)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

	Religion taught in Public schools	Islamic education can be taught in public schools	Confessional or non-confessional	Alternate course on 'Ethics'	Opt out option available from religion and ethics class	Private Islamic School allowed to be opened	Government funding available (partial or complete) for private Islamic schools
Malta	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUSLIM COMMUNITY

From the data summarized in this section and further details in coming country-specific discussions, following recommendations may be of assistance to the Muslim community in acquiring appropriate Islamic education for their children.

### **Development of future leaders:**

- First and the foremost thing is the development of capable leaders who can effectively lead and guide Muslims. We see a lack of management skills, initiative and leadership in many communities depriving them of working effectively and remain divided into smaller sectarian or ethnic groups. Effective Muslim leaders for tomorrow will be able to break these sectarian and ethnic barriers and connect to the bigger picture. Having a vision is critical. Without a clear vision, we will never be able to take right steps in right direction.
- In my opinion, it is not enough for these future leaders to be 'general' leaders. It would be highly recommended for them to have a good thorough understanding of their faith so that they can defend their people for orientalist, missionary, and Islamophobic attacks.

### **Staying Connected with Religion:**

- When Muslims live in non-Muslim countries, there is a very high risk of getting disconnected from religion due to prevalent societal norms and general practices which they naturally want to follow in order to not look different. Due to this, some Muslims get distanced from authentic Islamic instruction and what they are left to hear is internet, media and 'word-of-mouth' tells them which may or may not be close to reality. This can be one of the potential causes for many social issues such as drugs usage, radicalization, poor academic performance etc. We, therefore, recommend seriousness about religious education as it would not come by itself, we will need to make an effort to ensure a bright future of our coming generation as Muslims who can become role models in societies they live.
- Our next generation is going to face a lot of criticism and see creation of doubts aimed at shaking religious affiliations. It is in line with one of the ahadith of our beloved master Muhammad ﷺ in which he is reported to have said: "There will come upon the people a time when holding onto the religion will be like holding onto hot coal." (Tirmidhi). In my opinion, in such an age and time, only those people would remain steadfast on religion who are intellectually and emotionally attached to it and can appropriately respond back to deception thrown out at ummah. Education has a key role to play in this and we need to ensure that we educate our children about such issues. There is no way our children won't be able to access articles, books, videos and other material denying the existence of God or questioning the very fundamentals of our beliefs. If we do not explain and answer such things to our next generation, they can easily get deceived.

### **First Education begins at home:**

- Though Islamic schools can be opened in many countries and religious education can be provided through public schools in numerous countries, there is no doubt that first, foremost and most effective Islamic education begins at home. In order to prepare for that, Muslim parents need to understand their religions more than what they understand today and be a role model for their children which they can proudly refer to in their communities.

### **Establishing good relationship with state and community:**

- Muslim communities should seek to establish positive relationships with governments and seek opportunities to clarify any misunderstandings. We see a growing trend of Islamophobia across almost all of Europe irrespective of the size of Muslim population fueled by right-wing extremist Islamophobes who stir the idea that Islam is going to take over their land (even in countries where Muslims are a few thousand in a population of millions). This is mainly due to inhuman activities done internationally by some who call themselves Muslim and put Islamic symbols on their flags but adhere to none of the blessed teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ about being merciful to humanity.
- It is also observed that in numerous countries, Muslim migrants do not have adequate skills in knowledge. It not only hinders effective integration with society but also impact other aspects of their social life, such as lower performance in academics. Muslims should accordingly focus on language mastering in order to effectively establish a relationship with the broader community, serve as effective citizens and spread the noble word.

#### **Working as an Ummah – Helping our brothers and sisters in need:**

- The study reveals that in most of the countries researched while writing this book, Muslim organizations are in severe financial strife. There mosques and schools cannot open because they do not have enough finances. Though some countries do not allow foreign funding, many do. It, therefore, requires other well-established and financially stable governments and organizations to play their role and helping Muslim communities in need. We do see some of these efforts from Turkey and Saudi Arabia. However, there is an opportunity to do much more than what is currently happening.

#### **Making Islamic Schools a role Model:**

- In some places, we see Islamic schools being true role models and leading the community in terms of academic achievements and community services, but this trend is not prevalent across the board. There are many schools which are severely suffering due to lack of appropriate leadership, awareness about relevant legislation, lack of professionalism and other aspects. In some cases, unfortunately, some fraudulent people were able to make their way up and misuse the resources. If the community doesn't realize the importance of effectively manage ITS educational institutions, it may get too late. Many parents complain about these issues but do not do much about it themselves. We all need to understand our role and own our institutions. In most cases, these organizations serve as the only place where our children can learn about Islam.

#### **Effective Review of Islamic Education Curriculum in Public/ State Schools:**

- Islamic Education curricula, either provided in accordance with the state-approved syllabus, or community recommended curriculum, confessional or non-confessional, needs to be critically reviewed to ensure that it adds value to Muslim children's understanding of Islam. It is reported in many countries that though the education is non-confessional, education is still believed to be abundantly embedded with concepts of particular faiths which potentially serve as indoctrination for young minds.

#### **Teacher Training:**

- In many countries, there are some specific requirements regarding teacher training. Many Muslim communities could not start delivering Islamic education in schools despite legal provisions

due to lack of availability of state qualified teachers. Whereas in some cases, issues still come up regarding Islamic studies and Arabic teachers not holding relevant teaching qualifications. We should proactively deal with this issue and either work with existing institutions to get relevant programs being offered or build institutions that can produce us good future educators for our Ummah.

#### **Online Education:**

- Online education can be one of the sustainable future strategies to deliver Islamic instruction to communities which are not large enough in numbers to have Islamic schools in their localities or live in countries where Islamic schools are not permitted. We see some effort on that already in progress at school and higher education level, however, there is a need to make it more relevant and interesting for next high-tech generation. We need instructional and content design experts to develop engaging platforms which can deliver essential and advanced education on Islamic sciences from school levels all the way up to higher education degrees.

#### **Supplementary Schools:**

- Supplementary schools (evening/ weekend/ Sunday) have been operating in many European Muslim communities. However, there is a need to critically review their effectiveness from a psychological perspective and re-conceptualize curricula and teaching philosophies. They should be made an interesting place where pupils should look forward to going rather than a disliked obligation made compulsory by parents. These schools should have an element of fun integrated into curricula to keep students engaged. Teachers should come out of their traditional military style disciplined approach and be approachable friends for their students. Focus should be on the development of character and infusing a spirit of life-long learning.

### **ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN COUNTRIES WITH GREATER THAN 100,000 MUSLIM POPULATION**

#### **GERMANY:**

There are around 700,000 school-going Muslim children in Germany ("Islam in Germany," 2015).

#### **EDUCATIONAL POLICIES:**

Policies concerning religious education vary considerably throughout Germany. In general, German practice is to provide religious instruction in schools (DW TV, 2005).

The German constitution grants parents the right to have their children educated according to their own religious tradition. While maintaining a neutral posture toward religion, the state is nonetheless responsible for providing the space for the teaching of religion in a confessional manner. In other words, the provision of RE as a school subject is a shared undertaking that involves both the state and the religious communities, meaning that the state practically supports religious education in schools. Since the state itself is prohibited from interfering with religious matters, it must cooperate with officially recognized religious communities or those that are classified as public cooperation. (Berglund, 2015)

By law, any community with a sufficient number of students may take part in this program.

Although religious education at state schools is a constitutional right in Germany, it has been argued in the public debate that these guarantees only apply to Christian religions, or “to the religions traditionally present within Western Europe, thus excluding Islam” (Robbers, 2000: 148). Roman Catholics and Protestants have conducted such classes (publicly funded) for decades, and Jews were given similar rights in 2003. Taught by the church- or synagogue-appointed teachers with curricula certified by the state’s education ministries, religion classes are graded, but not mandatory. (Pommereau, 2010).

Students not taking religious education must take a replacement subject e.g. ethics or philosophy. (except in Bremen and Berlin)

In Nord-Rhein Westphalen (NRW) a replacement subject is only provided and compulsory in the senior cycle. There is no replacement subject in Hamburg as religious education in the state schools is very open until class 6. It is omitted in the 7th and 8th school year and is an optional subject from class nine.

#### NEED FOR ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN GERMANY:

Fearing that students who are not involved in state-supervised religious courses may be exposed to extremism by listening to preachers who do not possess solid Islamic background, there has been some impetus for authorities to take action by initiating Islamic religious lessons at public schools.

“A sound knowledge of Islamic theology and philosophy and psychology, and strategies of discourse and discussion,” is the best antidote there is to extremism, Harry Harun Behr of Frankfurt University told the Christian Science Monitor on Thursday, April 23. (“Islamic Education in Germany Fights Radical Islam,” 2015)

The courses are indeed meant to contribute to better understanding between kids with different backgrounds and religions. But Muslim organizations in Germany want more. For years they have been demanding that Islamic education be introduced to schools on a par with the Catholic and Protestant lessons -- that is an instruction that not only inform kids about Islam but also communicates Muslim values and the Islamic faith (Passow, 2006).

It has traditionally been difficult for Muslims to establish religious instruction due to regional governments failing to recognize Islam as a religious community, as there is no consensus organization.

One of the obstacles to including Islam in school-taught religions, some say, is that it lacks an accepted entity to offer guidance. Germany’s Muslims are mostly Sunnis; the rest are mainly Shiites, Alevis, or followers of the south Asian Ahmadiyya group. “There isn’t one Islam, and it’s not easy to reflect the different manifestations of Islam’s pluralism in a class on Islam,” says Jamal Malik, chair of Islamic Studies at the University of Erfurt (Pommereau, 2010).

#### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

In 1980, the Islamic Federation petitioned Berlin school authorities to establish religious instruction in the city’s schools.

In addition to others filed in 1983 and 1987, it was rejected.

In March 1994, the Islamic Federation sued and won; Berlin's Administrative Appeal Court ruled in 1998 that the Islamic Federation must be recognized as a religious community under section 23(1) of the Berlin Schools Act, since a religious community is defined by a consensus about faith and belief, regardless of whether the religion is organized as a public corporation or a private society.

The court rejected the argument put forth by Berlin school authorities, which said that it could not deal with religions which were not organized or similar to public corporations.

The Federal Administrative Court left it to the Berlin's Appeal Court to interpret the meaning of "religious community" within the Berlin Schools Act. (UC Davis) On February 23, 2000, Germany's highest court for administrative law, the Bundesverwaltungsgericht, ruled that Berlin's Islamische Föderation may offer religious instruction in Berlin schools; although, Berlin school authorities must approve the curriculum.

The organization began teaching at 20 Berlin public schools in Fall 2002, and extended courses to 37 elementary schools in Fall of 2004.

#### DELIVERY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Nonetheless, over the last few years, some federal states have reached agreements with various Islamic groups concerning instruction.

Each of the 16 states determines its own education system and how noncompulsory religion, or ethics, instruction is offered. Islamic instruction in some form is available in all former West German states, though none of the eastern ones, where there are historically few Muslim immigrants (Smale, 2014).

Many states have run trial Islamic programs, including North-Rhine/Westphalia, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Schleswig-Holstein, Bremen, Lower Saxony, Bavaria, and Rhineland-Palatinate.

In these states, advisory boards comprised of parents and representatives of non-official Islamic associations have been formed to determine IRE (Islamic Religious Education) content. German Professor Yasar Sarikaya has noted that the type of IRE offered in these pilot projects differed from that which is constitutionally guaranteed to German Muslims, in that it is non-denominational and primarily teaches Islamic culture and history. According to Sarikaya, the main reason for this is the complete lack of recognized official Islamic communities. (Berghlund, 2015)

The present situation is that in various German federal states, religious instruction has been offered to children of the Islamic faith on a voluntary basis. Aside from Berlin schools, the curriculum is required to *exclude* preaching of the faith and education of the faith.

"No state has done more to bring Islam classes into schools than North Rhine-Westphalia, where one-third of Germany's Muslims live. Here, 150 public schools offer Islamic studies to 13,000 children in Grades 1 through 10. About 200 schools nationally teach the courses, established by state governments and local Muslim groups". (Pommereau, 2010)

#### TEACHING OF ISLAM IN THE GERMAN LANGUAGE:

In March 2008, The German Conference on Islam under the chairmanship of Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble also called for a comprehensive introduction of the Islamic religion in public

schools, to be taught in German. He emphasized that programs taught by teachers with degrees from German universities would promote integration.

As part of this effort, Saphir, a textbook for fifth and sixth-grade Islamic religious classes in Germany has been developed, with editions for grades seven through 10 underway as of November 2008. Issues covered include the concept of God, the life of the Prophet Mohammed, the structure of the Koran, social responsibility. Harry Harun Behr of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg says the book “does not aim to educate pupils to believe, but rather to make responsible decisions concerning faith.”

In Berlin, the Islamische Föderation (Islamic Federation) has been authorized to develop Islamic education programs alongside those voluntary programs in Christianity and Lebenskunde (knowledge about life). Islamische Föderation achieved this after twenty years of court procedures.

One of their recent developments is IKRA textbook in German for Islamic education.

#### SECTARIAN ISSUES:

Alevites, a Shiite denomination, have been especially successful in getting officially recognized as a religious community and be able to cooperate with the state to provide religious education in public schools in some states. However, the terms “Islamic” and “Muslim” do not appear this association’s formal self-description (Berglund, 2015b). This may potentially exposes non-shia students to ‘Shiite concept of Islam’ through state schools.

#### PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

In Germany, Article 7, section 4 of the German Basic Law established the right to operate private schools with government approval. However, the percentage of Germans that attend private schools is relatively low when compared to other European nations.

#### RESPONSE TO ISLAMIC EDUCATION FROM GERMAN SOCIETY:

Muslim religious education lessons have generated great public controversy with one set of citizens gathering under the banner of Islamophobia, such as PEGIDA, and other strongly opposing them.

Negative German attitudes toward Islam are not based on direct experience with Muslims, but are rather “imported” from media reports on international conflicts and terrorism in line with media’s excessive focus on conflicts involving Islam which has caused many Germans to wrongly conclude that Muslim integration in their country has completely failed.(Berglund, 2015b)

Since the introduction of Islamic instruction in Berlin, requests are coming up to consider religious values in other academic activities as well – school offices are often inundated with petitions to excuse girls from swimming, sports, and class field trips, based on religious grounds. The Islamische Föderation ran into trouble with the Berlin education ministry for allegedly disseminating pamphlets and forms to Muslim parents, advocating the exemption from their daughters from participating in co-educative classes.

There remains a great deal of skepticism among Berliners and about the Islamische Föderation and its public school program.

Muslim students also face certain restrictions at public school. According to a recent court decision on a case of Muslim student praying in the school hallway, the court has ruled that religious should be kept out of school and the boy (and all other Muslim students) cannot pray at school ("No Religion at School," 2010).

#### OTHER FORMS OF EDUCATION

Fazil Altin, a lawyer who is president of the Islamic Federation, said Muslims and the city authorities in Berlin had wasted 20 years while they battled in court about whether Islam could be taught. Then, Mr. Altin said, the federation had to overcome suspicions about indoctrination — and all for 40 minutes' instruction per week, which he called "pretty paltry." (Smale, 2014)

In his view, it will take more than formal state instruction in Islam to bridge the cultural gap between observant Muslims and a highly secular German society. "It is difficult to be a Muslim in Germany," said Mr. Altin, who said he had been denied access to clients in jails because of his faith. "The fact is, we are seen as a danger."

In Germany, according to the Central Institute of Islamic Archives in Germany, less than 20 percent of all Muslim school children attend Koran schools.

In Berlin in June 2004, Muslims and non-Muslims joined forces and founded the Muslimische Akademie with the support of the Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (Federal Agency for Civic Education). The aims of the academy were to encourage the participation of Muslims, and offer an independent forum for inter- and intra-religious dialogue.

#### FRANCE

##### PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The French public education system is framed and regulated by the principle of *laïcité* and by the 1989 Law on Orientation in Education, which affirms the individual right to freedom of conscience. In practice, these two principals have come into conflict, particularly with regard to students belonging to religious minorities like Islam.

"The concept of *laïcité* can be defined as the neutrality of the state towards religious beliefs, and the complete isolation of religious and public spheres. According to the concept of *laïcité*, the French state and government do not take a position on any religion or religious beliefs. They can only speak on religious subjects when considering the practical consequences of the beliefs and practices of a religion on the lives of its citizens. It also means, in theory at least, that there can be no interference by any religion in the functioning of the government. Equally, it also means, in theory at least, that there can be no interference by the government in the religious life of its citizens, or in the forms of religion to which they adhere." ("The concept of *Laïcité* in France," 2007)

It is a central objective and responsibility of French public schools to train students in Republican values including *laïcité* and to ensure both equal treatment of individual pupils and respect for pluralism. As such, local officials have the competence to regulate the public expression of religious belonging in schools. The conflict over the banning of the hijab illustrates the tension between public space and private choices; the difficulties inherent in balancing the requirements of *laïcité* against the needs of Muslim students.

In French primary schools, no religion course can be organized, whereas in secondary schools religion can be taught by chaplains (but not during the school timetable). However, as of 2004, no Islamic chaplaincy operated in any public secondary schools. In addition to this, the banning of the hijab in public schools has provided the impetus for the establishment of independent Islamic schools in France.

#### PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

In France, the governing secularizing concept of *laïcité* in public schools means that private institutions are the only option for communities seeking Islamic education programs. In addition to *laïcité*, the debate over the hijab has further developed a demand for the establishment of state-approved private Islamic schools.

In theory, the Debré Law of 1959 introduced two possibilities for French Muslim private schools to receive state funding, along with the many Catholic and Jewish parochial schools: the simple contract (contract simple) and the contract of association (contrat d'association). Under a simple contract, staff expenses are covered by the state for teachers and state-accredited professors. Though private schools with a simple contract have some autonomy in determining the content of their curricula, they are still obligated to educate students at comparable academic levels to schools offering official state accredited degrees. They must also assign authorized textbooks and develop curriculums and schedules similar to those in public schools. The contract of association allows for more significant financial support: the state pays for staff expenses and also for material expenses on the basis of costs in the public sector. It also allows more freedom in defining the content of the curriculum. Under either contract, a school cannot officially benefit from the public financial support of more than 10 percent of their annual expenses.

#### FUNCTIONING PRIVATE ISLAMIC SCHOOLS:

The few existing private Islamic institutions include one school on the island of Réunion (the only institution under contract of association), established several decades ago; two in the northeast Paris suburb of Aubervilliers, established in 2001; one in Lille, established in 2003, and Lyon's lycée college Al Kindi, established in March 2007. None of these institutions is under either type of state contract.

"Averroès High School in Lille has been in the spotlight for a decade. Ten years ago, it was France's first private Muslim school to follow the national curriculum. Now, it's one of the country's top-rated schools" ("France - France's first private Muslim school tops the ranks," 2013). The school was founded by the local Muslim community in 2003, almost ten years after the exclusion of 19 girls from a nearby lycée for wearing the Islamic veil (MacGuill, 2013). Recalling the humble beginning of school in 2003, said Amar Lasfar, rector of the Lille mosque and president of the Averroès school said: "On our first day, there were 34 journalists, including one from Japan – compared to only 11 students and 19 teachers". School enrollments were reported to be 300 in 2013 ("France - France's first private Muslim school tops the ranks," 2013).

Another private school, Éducation et Savoir, opened its doors in the Parisian suburb of Vitry-sur-Seine (Val-de-Marne) in March 2008. The school offered one primary education class for the 2007-2008 school year, and has plans to accommodate 40 high school students through Spring 2009. In addition to the state-mandated curriculum, the school will offer classes on Arabic and Islam.

#### FUNDING FOR ISLAMIC SCHOOLS:

Despite the Debré Laws, state support for private Islamic schools has only recently been acquired by only a few institutions.

The lack of representative bodies capable of negotiating for state funding, lack of long-standing and established schools, lack of suitable instructors, and the current political climate surrounding Islam in France have all been cited as reasons government funding remains difficult to obtain.

Private donors and associations in France have funded the school. Mahmoud Awwad, director at Éducation et Savoir school claims that their biggest challenge has not been obtaining an operation license, but obtaining funding.

La Reussite Islamic School, one of the two Aubervilliers institutions, is also experiencing severe financial issues.

#### OTHER EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS:

Because so many low-income Muslim families are unable to cover the full cost of tuition and fees, religious education of young Muslims is generally provided independently outside of school hours either by the family at home or by associations and mosques in the framework of Koranic courses.

#### MUSLIMS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS:

This increasing, unmet demand for affordable, quality Islamic education in France is currently fostering a new trend: the growth of Muslim enrollment in private Catholic schools. Educators estimate that Muslims now make up nearly 10 percent of France's Catholic school student body. Many families report feeling like the Catholic Church better understands and is more tolerant toward Islam than the French state, as it recognizes Muslim holidays, offers optional Arabic classes, and allows girls to wear the hijab.

Many parents say they have chosen the schools because they believe they all "share the same God." They also believe the schools better prepare students for college and career success, and it is affordable.

Catholic schools in France are considered to be much less expensive than private schools in other countries. In return for the schools' teaching the national curriculum and being open to students of all faiths, the government pays teachers' salaries and a per-student subsidy. Annual costs for parents average 1,400 euros (less than \$2,050) for junior high school and 1,800 euros (about \$2,630) for high school, according to the Roman Catholic educational authority.(Bennhold, 2008)

The Muslim population in catholic schools go as high as 80% in some instances. Overall, out of 2 million catholic school places, 10% are occupied by Muslim students who are treated more favorably in these schools as compared to state schools.(Bennhold, 2008)

#### UNITED KINGDOM:

While the following overview primarily focuses on England, it should also be noted that significant differences exist between England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland when it comes to the provision of education (Berglund, 2015).

There are an increasing number of different types of school in England, and it can be difficult to distinguish between them (*Comparison of different types of school - A guide to schools in England*, 2015). These schools differ from each other in terms of government regulation, choice of curriculum, funding, specialized subjects and other aspects. This in totality presents a complex situation which needs critical analysis.

About 7,000 state schools in Britain are faith schools – roughly one in three of the total – educating 1.7 million pupils. Of the 590 faith-based secondary schools five are Jewish, two Muslim and one Sikh - the rest are Church of England, Roman Catholic, and other Christian faiths.

#### POPULATION CONTEXT:

“One-third of Muslims are under age 16 as compared with one-fifth of the population as a whole. There are approximately half a million Muslim children and young people currently receiving education in British schools and colleges. Increasing numbers of Muslims are entering further and higher education. As a result of this younger age profile, Government education policies aimed at children and young people will have a disproportionate impact on Muslim communities. It is vital, therefore, that Government departments and agencies implementing and delivering these policies lead the way in ensuring that policy is sensitive to the needs of Muslims” (Choudhury, 2005, p. 104).

#### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY:

According to Dr. Jenny Berglund

“Religious education (RE) in England is a non-confessional multi-faith school subject; its aims are educational rather than religious. While it seeks to contribute to the pupil’s personal, spiritual, and intellectual development, it avoids cultivating an interest in and/or promoting any particular religion—or, for that matter, “religion” in general.” (Berglund, 2015)

#### PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

The UK currently provides no specific instruction on Islamic education in public schools. However, local education authorities are able to support ethnic minority communities to set up supplementary schools, which provide education in evenings or on Saturdays, to maintain linguistic and cultural traditions.

#### SCHOOLING CHOICES BY PARENTS AND KEY ISSUES:

“Whilst Islam is slowly but steadily growing amongst the indigenous population of the UK - and we now have the first children born to Muslim converts at the compulsory school age (5-16) -, the majority of Muslim pupils in the UK are born to immigrant families, mostly of the second generation. For some time, Muslim immigrants heard other pressing difficulties to solve and the education of their children remained a low-ranking priority. It was only after a large number of Muslims acquired a standard of living comparable to that of their non-Muslim contemporaries, that they started worrying about their children's Islamic education and upbringing. By then, the un-monitored exposure to Western norms and lifestyles had already produced painful results for many parents. Not only were Muslim children not able to read the Qur'an nor had any knowledge about their faith, but also did they copy the lifestyle of their non-Muslim class fellows and broke with their inherited cultural norms” (Bleher, 1991).

With regards to the current situation, there is significant diversity in what Muslim parents want. While some would like to send their children to schools with an Islamic ethos, others merely want single-sex schooling; others again would be happy to send their children to community or church schools so long as these are respectful of their faith and supportive of their distinctive identity. The majority of Muslims in the UK attend a community school. However, at present many Muslim parents feel that community schools are not meeting the needs of their children (Choudhury, 2005, p. 104).

Many Muslim parents would appreciate the option for their children to study Arabic in school, and also for them to receive a form of Religious Education that gave them more opportunities to enrich their understanding of their own faith as well as studying others.

The key educational issues concerning Muslim parents are:

- the continuing poor academic results of Muslim children;
- the need to eradicate institutional racism and racist and Islamophobic bullying;
- the lack of recognition or support for their children's faith identity; and
- the inadequacy of spirituals and moral education that schools provide.

Some Muslim parents and communities have a concern that mainstream schools are unable to fulfill the desired path of learning. In addition to above, lack of appropriate facilities and curriculum, policies that may be insensitive to Islamic belief, and the increase of exclusionary feelings among Muslim students are found to play their role.

Discrimination and negative attitudes towards Islam have manifested in the Muslim experience of the mainstream education system. For example, 32 percent of 110 polled Muslims in Hackney aged 15-25 surveyed by the North London Muslim Housing Association reported poor performance in school was sometimes attributed to the lack of familiarity and sensitivity of teachers concerning Islam. In addition, many reported that expectations concerning their achievement were low, and they were not encouraged to perform well. The FOSIS (Federation of Students Islamic Societies in UK and Ireland) cites reported incidents of verbal and physical abuse, threats, and alienation.

#### PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:

In the UK, local education authorities are able to support ethnic minority communities to set up independent "supplementary" schools on evenings and Saturdays, which provide education in the evening or on Saturdays to maintain linguistic and cultural traditions of immigrant populations.

Religious communities have a right to establish their own independent schools. Such schools must be registered with the Registrar of Independent Schools and must meet certain minimum standards.

According to Bleher (1991) in an article on Islamic Party of Britain website:

"The British education system has two main streams: the maintained sector, i.e. schools run by the government, and the independent sector, i.e. private schools. If independent schools fulfill certain requirements, they may obtain voluntary aided status, that is they will largely be financed by the government whilst retaining their independent character. This is the case of the Catholic and Church of England schools, a number of Jewish schools, and schools following other ideologies or

educational theories. Applications by Muslim schools have however been prejudiced in the past, and many politicians have argued that the door for opening further voluntary aided schools should be closed to avoid the teaching of Islamic fundamentalism. Anybody at any time can open an independent school. This school has to register with the Department for Education (DfE) for a provisional registration. Once it has started to operate, it is then visited by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Independent Schools (HMI) who comment on the suitability of the building and the educational provision. The building has to be of sufficient size and has to comply with fire and safety regulations, the number and qualifications of the teachers, materials and organization have to be adequate for the number and age of children attending the school. If the HMI find the situation satisfactory, the school will be given final registration by the DES, otherwise, it will be served a notice of complaint. If after a given time it fails to meet the requirements laid down in the notice of complaint, it has to close and stop operating". While the legal situation theoretically permitted the setting up of a Muslim school, in practice there were a number of obstacles. First of all, a suitable building had to be found. The other challenge mentioned by Bleher was a shortage of Muslim teachers with right qualifications. The situation was compounded by the lack of leadership.

In order to take Islamic schools to next steps, these issues need to be considered at the community level. Responsibility lies with individuals, societies and organizations to think beyond racial belonging, nationalities, and sects and help grow Islamic schools in accordance with relevant legislative requirements and educational best-practices.

In England and Wales, there has traditionally been State funding for Church of England, Catholic, and Jewish faith schools. In Northern Ireland and Scotland, there has traditionally been state funding for Catholic schools. Since 1997, the Labour government has extended this funding to other minority faith schools, including Muslim schools.

At present, there is state funding of seven Muslim schools, among them: Al Furqan School in Birmingham, Islamia School in London and Feversham College in Bradford. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that there is a "significant interest" among about 30 of England's 120 independent Muslim schools to enter the state sector, and the government has indicated that the number of faith schools in the UK could increase in the coming years.

Of the over 120 Muslim schools in Britain, at least, 37 are in London. In London, the debate around Muslim-only schools and other faith-based schools continues to generate deliberations both in and outside of Muslim communities. The debate concerns the ability for faith-based schools to receive state (and tax-generated) funding; however, schools may only do so after proving they have qualified staff, facilities, and teaching the curriculum.

Parents and community provide the funding for the majority of these schools, while the Waqf Al-Birr Educational Trust and the UK Islamic Waqf have made financial contributions to others.

#### DEBATE ABOUT FAITH SCHOOLS:

"At present, education policy views minorities only in terms of race and ethnicity. In particular, although many Muslim children and young people experience Islamophobia both in and out of school, anti-discrimination policy in education tend to focus much more on racial or ethnic discrimination, rather than religious discrimination. Without the collection of data on the basis of religion, education policy will not be able to meet the needs of individuals from different faith communities" (Choudhury, 2005, p. 105).

On the other hand, proposals to increase the role of faith schools in the state education sector have generated much debate. The Commission for Racial Equality has expressed concern that single faith schools could damage multiculturalism, and the Cattle Report cautioned that the funding of faith schools would increase social segregation between different minority communities. One response to this is a proposal by faith communities for “multi-faith” schools that would appreciate faith but would not be targeted at a particular faith. This is in line with what many European countries practice under the banner of non-confessionary religious education.

In January 2008, a House of Commons select committee raised concerns about the government’s proposals to increase the number of independent faith schools in the UK.) These proposals remain a lively topic of conversation in the UK today.

The government remains committed to increasing the role of faith schools in the State sector but has said that new faith schools will have to “demonstrate how they will be inclusive and work in partnership with other schools.” The government recently rejected a proposal in the Cattle Report that at least 25 percent of the intake in a faith school reflect the other cultures and ethnicities within the local area, but they want to “encourage all schools to ensure that their intake reflects the local community in all their diversity.”

Some of the Muslim schools are delivering best educational results in the UK. “With students achieving amazing results, Islamic schools have been rated as the highest-achieving learning institutes in Britain”(“Islamic Schools Rated Britain’s Best,” 2013). Tauheedul Islam Girls’ High School in the industrial town of Blackburn, was the highest-achieving educational institute in the city with Darwen in North West England in 2013. Results showed that 95 percent of students achieved 5+ A\*-C (including English and Maths), while 76 percent achieved the newly introduced English Baccalaureate. The outcome places the Islamic school nationally above all non-selective schools. Statistics from the Department of Education also showed that Tauheedul is the best school in the country for achievement by students with low prior achievement at primary school.

The majority of students with low prior achievement (93 percent) achieved 5A\*-Cs (including English and Math) at Tauheedul, nationally.

In 2014, a controversy arose about some of the Muslims schools in which school inspection authorities believed that student well-being was at risk as chief inspector noted that “all the schools focused too heavily on Islamic teachings” (Richardson, 2014). One of the recommendations was that "All schools must prepare children for life in modern Britain." At one school, inspectors found pupils did not know the difference between sharia and British law. This is criticized by many, including school administration, as not the best of questions to ask school students. When we analyze all the findings, we can link them to following three broader categories:

- Potential for leadership improvement in Islamic schools
- Requirement for a critical review of compliance against national educational requirements
- More proactive engagement with authorities, parents and community members in clarifying misunderstandings and confusions (such as interpretation of ‘Shariah’ by most western authorities)

The Muslim community needs to tackle these issues on this front. There are some other key challenges as well which need immediate consideration.

In the age of growing Islamophobia and skewed representation of Islam by deviant groups like self-proclaimed ISIS and fear-mongering media, development of authentic scholarship and ensuring, at least, base level Islamic education for all Muslim is essential to preserve faith and enable Muslims lead a confident life as contributing members of British society.

#### OTHER SCHOOLING OPTIONS:

There are approximately 250,000 Muslim children attending roughly 2,000 weekend/ evening madrasas in the UK. Children typically attend for up to two hours every night until the age of 14-15. Most madrasas operate out of mosques, but a sizeable number are based in schools or community centers. Some are run informally in private homes. Over a quarter have more than 140 pupils a week (Bawden, 2011).

There are some differences from location to location and place of birth of immigrant families. For example, A high proportion of Bradford's Muslim population has family roots in south Asia, and in many cases they come from rural areas of Kashmir. About 9,000 children in Bradford top up their regular state school education with at least an hour of instruction at a madrassa or religious school, several days a week. According to a report by Bradford council of mosques, this number is expected to keep on increasing.

According to The Economist ("Learning to live together, or separately," 2013):

It also notes that many religious part-time/ supplementary Islamic schools "have a very narrow understanding of faith education - for example, limited to assisting children to identify and read the Quranic text, to memorize the five pillars of Islam and to be able to offer the five prayers. This is very basic, essential and highly commendable but parents desire their children to be given a fuller understanding of the faith..." And unfortunately, not all parents were as demanding as they should be. Indeed, many "operate from a very low expectation base" and feel that "as long as [their children] come out being able to read the Quran, perform five daily prayers and know some other basics they are quite content."

In certain schools, there is "considerable difficulty" for children who receive most of their education in English and find their madrassa teacher is addressing them in a language of which they have "very basic or no command". What that means in hard reality, according to people who know the Bradford scene, is that in the poorest madrassas the teacher speaks nothing much but Urdu, which the English-born pupils hardly understand.

"The fact that Islam was more or less seen as a cultural pattern and that lessons were offered in Urdu rather than in English, whilst the Qur'an was deciphered but not understood or explained, produced a situation whereby the children experienced two un-reconcilable worlds: the home and the mosque on the one hand; school and society at large on the other. Naturally, the influence of non-Muslim society gained the upper hand, as children were exposed to its leaching all day long, re-enforced by TV programmes which their parents uncritically permitted them to watch. Until now there is little critical evaluation of the influences of mass media, especially TV, amongst the Muslim community, and the situation has become bleaker through the introduction of video programmes which spread rapidly within Muslim homes. The weekend school, sometimes complemented through evening classes, was unable to instill lasting values within the children or foster a proper understanding of Islam. Teachers faced tired children who were hardly motivated, and had to combat the effects of the day school which offered more excitement and imposed greater authority" (Bleher, 1991). Due to these factors,

children frequently reacted to the obligatory attendance at Islamic evening or weekend classes by distancing themselves from Islamic schools.

A far more detailed knowledge of the faith is imparted by Bradford's full-time Islamic schools which presents secular and religious subjects under an 'Islamic Prism'.

However, it needs to be kept in mind that these evening or weekend schools are the only exposure many children have for Islam. What is required to be done to make these part-time supplementary institutions a 'fun' thing for children to attend which they should look up to every evening or every week. There is no doubt that mosque committees have a huge role to play in this. However, the role of parents cannot be undermined who need to ensure good Islamic upbringing at homes as well as actively participate in improving community organizations. Only criticizing and not taking any practical steps to nurture and develop good community organizations would not help Muslim community at all considering the times and situations expected to be seen in coming years and decades.

## **ITALY**

In this very Catholic country, there have always been other religions: a sprinkling of Waldensian Protestants in the north, traces of Islam in Sicily, well-established but small Jewish neighborhoods in Rome, Venice, and other big cities. But for the first time in centuries, a minority religion is set to become a major player in Italy's future. Fueled largely by immigration from North Africa, the Middle East, and Albania, Islam is now the second-largest faith in what is still a nation that is 94 percent Catholic. Italy's demographic changes provide a modern challenge, not only for these two world religions, but also for this nation positioned at the crossroads of continents, faith, and history.

"Several Catholic churches look suspiciously like mosques, having been transformed into churches when Christians retook Sicily in the year 991, after two centuries of Tunisian rule left a lasting Islamic stamp on the island. Over the past millennium, however, the religious life of Italy and its islands has been the domain of the Catholic Church"(Israely, 2008).

Italy has a wide mix of Muslims that mirrors the diversity of the faith around the world: There are some 10,000 Italian-born converts, a largely moderate flock from Morocco, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, and vast numbers of arrivals from Albania. The Muslim community has not received official government recognition - bestowed on an array of smaller faiths, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and Buddhists - that would guarantee state-approved religious education, finance mosques, and associations, and legalize Muslim marriage rites.

## **LEGISLATION REGARDING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

### **USE OF PUBLIC FACILITIES:**

Under Article 8, Paragraph 3 of the Italian constitution, all religious communities, including Islamic ones, may use the classrooms of state schools for religious education when the number of members of the concerned religious denomination is considerable, and when there are no available places of worship.

### **FUNDING:**

The costs of such teaching are not with state funds, but paid by the religious community. An agreement with the Director of the Regional School Office is also necessary.

#### **CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS:**

Under the Italian legal system, it is a legal requirement that schools provide Catholic religious education from an early age, though parents may opt their children out of this curriculum.

#### **ALTERNATE TO CATHOLIC EDUCATION:**

According to an Italian court decision, alternatives to catholic education need to be provided ("IHEU | Italian court rules that schools must provide an alternative to religion classes," 2010).

The alternative to the Catholic education class is non-religious alternative course, in which material such as mythology legends and human rights are discussed – but only a minority of parents opts for this alternative curriculum.

Some schools offer secular subjects such as Music or economics etc. as an alternative (HABERMAN, 1988).

In 2012, an Islamophobic controversy arose when Italian education minister, Francesco Profumo, was portrayed as proposing Islam to be taught in public schools alongside the traditional teaching of Roman Catholicism. This controversy was quite baseless as he did not use the word 'Islam' but merely referred to pupils "from different countries, cultures, and religions," and a "more multiethnic" "multicultural" curriculum (Bodissey, 2012). Some journalists even tried to further drift public opinion by attaching 'emotions' and fear-mongering such as in the article "Italy: Land of Gourmet Food, Art, Wine, Opera and...the Muslim Brotherhood? It Might Not Be Far-Fetched" (Tiffany Gabbay, 2012). Statistics do not show the possibility of 'Muslim conversion' of the country at all and majority of Muslim women do not get "cloaked in the darkness of a black burqa" as this article tries to portray.

#### **ISSUES FACED BY MUSLIM PUPILS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

The presence of Catholic symbols, largely crucifixes in courtrooms, schools, hospitals, and other public buildings has drawn criticism and complaint in a number of court cases and lawsuits, and further accentuates the minority status of the religion of Islam.

It is also highlighted by some researchers that many of the religious education teachers in schools are previous Christian missionaries (Yahya, 2009) and education, in general, has a flavor of ethnocentric and orientalist ideas.

Like other European countries, Islamophobic events are observed in Italian schools as well. Recently, an Italian headmaster has banned female Muslim students from wearing headscarves, claiming they constitute a "provocation". Aldo Duri, the headmaster of a school in the north-eastern Italian town Cervignano del Friuli, said that the measure, which applies in six colleges in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, had been made to promote the values of "tolerance, respect, and equality". In a recent incident, an Egyptian pupil was allegedly admitted to hospital for seven days after being attacked by a fellow pupil following an argument in class, reports *Messaggero Veneto* (Porter, 2015).

The decision to ban headscarf was later reversed on the advice of the Friuli region's personal-rights watchdog ("Friuli school head revokes Islamic veil ban - English," 2015).

#### PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

Article 33 of the Italian constitution grants private citizens and organizations the right to establish schools and educational institutes. As a result of the lack of public Islamic education programs, several foreign schools have been founded in Italy by governments of several Mediterranean states, including two by Libya (in Rome and Milan), and one by Egypt (in Milan).

In 2005, an Islamic school in Milan was closed, citing hygienic problems as the official reason. The media, however, put stress on the idea that famous Islamic terrorists were suspected to have attended the school.

#### BULGARIA

Orthodox church and Muslim community in Bulgaria consider confessional religious education in public schools as a key requirement to preserve statehood and cultural identities. Secular sectors within Bulgaria, however, oppose that and propose 'comparative religion' instead (Hajdinjak & Kosseva, 2011). The idea is however not approved by the government (Petrov, 2012).

Islamic education in Bulgaria operates formally as well as informally with around 700 weekend or after-school classes happening in the country (Osterman, 2014). In addition to regular part-time schools, Quranic summer schools are also organized (Merdjanova, 2013).

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee has compiled a very useful and extensive report about Muslim minorities in Bulgaria. From this report, we come to know following relevant information(BHC, 2003):

Art. 15(3) of the Law on Educational Degree, Educational Minimum, and Educational Plan of July 1999, as amended in 2002, stipulates that the mother tongue and religion classes are included in the section "obligatory selectable" courses on both primary/secondary and high school level. However, while the Turkish as a mother tongue instruction were introduced on an "obligatory elective" basis at schools, the study of religion remained on a "freely elective" level, and what is more, religious classes were practically realized only in a limited number of schools during the 2002-2003 academic year.

Ordinance No. 6 of May 28, 2001, of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) confirms the status of Religion/"Religion Islam" as "a freely elective" subject by virtue of Art. 20. The instructions in the Christian religion - under the name "Religion", and in Islam - under-"Religion Islam", is governed by Supplement No. 4 of the ORGANIZATION AND Management of the Activities in Schools of General Education, Professional and Special Schools during 2002-2003 Academic Year of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Supplement No. 4 contains Instruction regulating the teaching of "Religion"/"Religion Islam" on a "freely elective" basis (i.e. classes, which are outside the frame of the regular school curriculum, and are not counted towards the students' GPA) "in the municipal schools of Republic of Bulgaria". The Instruction establishes that Christian religion is studied from 1st to 8th grades of primary and secondary school, and Islam is studied from 2nd to 7th grades of primary and secondary school, each one class per week.

The Instruction in question makes the study of “Religion”/“Religion Islam” contingent upon students’ wish, expressed in a written request by the student, signed by his/her parent or guardian, and submitted to the school’s principal.

The Ministry of Education’s Organization and Management of the Activities in Schools of General Education, Professional and Special Schools during 2002-2003 Academic Year (p. 15, point 13), further envisages the “experimental study of Religion” in 128 schools throughout the country - one class per week - on an “obligatory elective” basis from 1st to 4th grade. It is, however, far from clear whether the provision includes only the study of the Christian religion - referred to as “Religion”, or includes Islam as well - referred to as “Religion Islam” since the provision only mentions the term “Religion”.

Only from the data presented in the state’s report under Art. 25 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of February 14, 2003 (see above), it becomes clear that the study of Islam as part of the regular school curricula (“obligatory elective”), was organized in 7 schools throughout the country with a total of 702 students enrolled, for the 2001/2002 academic year. Instructions in Orthodox Christianity for the same school year, on the other hand, were performed in 128 schools, with a total of 10,154 students in classes. As an optional subject (“freely elective”) the study of Islam is reported to have been organized in only 2 schools with 554 students enrolled, against the figure of 213 schools with 8,674 students studying Orthodox Christianity for the same academic year. Now juxtaposing the figure of about more than one million Muslims in Bulgaria, whose population is less than 8 million in total, the sum of 9 schools with 1,256 students enrolled in studying Islam as a religion is far from a satisfactory situation altogether.

Issues related to textbooks and supplementary materials in “Religion Islam” is another side of the problem of inadequate study of Islam at schools. From the visits we made to regions with compact Turkish minority population, it transpired that the number of schools, which include instructions in “Religion Islam” is not only limited, but what is more important, the literature provided for solely by the Chief Mufti’s Office appeared to be both narrow in terms of subject matter (i.e. only history of Islamic religion), and small as a volume (i.e. a relatively thin textbook, half of which is in Bulgarian, and the other half with the same content - in Turkish. As a supplement to the textbook there are several very thin and large-shrift booklets, whose total content students could exhaust in the course of several classes only.).

In her extensive study on Bulgarian Muslim minority, Ina Merdjanova (2013) presents following details about secondary education for Muslim students and funding of education providers:

Currently, there are three Islamic secondary schools in Shumen, in Russe and in Momchilgrad which follow the general curriculum for the state secondary schools, with additional classes in Islam. Seventy percent of the classes are on secular subjects (taught in Bulgarian) and 30 percent on religious subjects (taught in Turkish, mostly by teachers from Turkey). The schools are sponsored by the Chief Muftiate with funds from the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet). These are not medrese institutions in the traditional sense of the word. They are coeducational, with girls and boys studying together. In the current successor of the Nuvvap school in Shumen, which the author visited in March 2009, for example, there were 82 students, 42 girls, and 40 boys. Almost all students were of Turkish ethnicity, with a few Turkish-speaking Roma students. The graduates from the secondary Islamic schools can serve as imams or continue their education in any chosen discipline; there is a growing tendency for the imams to pursue higher education in the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia.

On the basis of the constitutional separation of religion from the state, after the fall of Communism the state discontinued its practice of paying the salaries of religious personnel. Each year, the Directorate of Religious Confessions at the Council of Ministers allows some financial support from the state budget to several denominations (the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Islamic Community, the Central Israeli Spiritual Council, some Protestant churches, and others). The support is meant mostly on the renovation of various religious sites of those communities and for covering some of their running expenses. The slow and partial restitution of the waqf properties related to the disputes over the leadership, on the one hand, and the often missing documentation about those properties, on the other, has made the Islamic Community heavily dependent on foreign funds. Turkey has been the most consistent and visible sponsor. This also gives more DIYANET more control on selecting teachers and influencing curriculum.

## NETHERLANDS

### PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

In the Netherlands, parents have the right to obtain religious education for their children in public schools under the 1984 Dutch Education Act, but they must find and pay the teacher (or relevant Churches do this on their behalf). Muslim parents use this legal opportunity only in exceptional cases.

Some municipalities (like Rotterdam), however, subsidize religious education. School authorities retain the power to choose which language courses are taught in, which has limited the development of Islamic religious instruction.

Burqas and face coverings were recently banned in Amsterdam's public schools. School authorities cited that the need for open student-teacher interaction superseded the need to wear a face covering. In 2003 at a higher vocational college in Amsterdam, three students were banned for wearing a face covering. However, the Equal Opportunities Committee (CGB) soon deemed the ban discriminatory. In 2005, the issue surfaced again when Parliament adopted a resolution urging the Government to ban the public wearing of face coverings. However, the integration minister stated that a comprehensive ban was not possible under the law—instead, he said that the ban may be permissible in case-specific scenarios such as in public schools.

### PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

In the Netherlands, the Dutch constitutional freedom of education allows religions to open their own schools at the state's expense.

In contrast to most EU countries (the other exception being Belgium), the majority of Dutch primary and secondary students (76.3 percent) attend the private, mainly confessional sector of education (Pépin, 2009, p. 87).

“With the presence in the country of a growing Muslim community, the state has supported the setting up of Islamic schools. There are 48 at primary level (attended by only about 5 percent of Muslim children) and two at the secondary level. In response to family demand, some municipalities have also supported the setting up of Islamic teaching in public schools, given, for example, by a local imam. Such teaching can be for up to three hours per week. It is only available, however, in 7 per cent of public primary schools” (Pépin, 2009, p. 90).

The majority of the day in Islamic schools must offer courses that follow a national curriculum, and a few hours per week may be allotted to religious lessons and ceremonies. In the beginning of the 2007 academic year, all Dutch Islamic primary schools were provided with an official Islamic teaching curriculum for pupils ages 4 through 12.

The new curriculum, the first of its kind in the Netherlands, was first presented at the As-Soeffah School in Amsterdam. The methodology and curriculum were developed by the Foundation for Teaching Methods (SLO) and the Board of Islamic Schools Organization (ISBO) – an umbrella organization of forty-two Muslim schools in the Netherlands. In the 2007 academic year, all 42 of the ISBO schools, as well as 4 other Islamic schools in the Netherlands, began to apply the new material.

As of 2002, Amsterdam housed eight private Islamic primary schools and one secondary school. According to the Schools Inspectorate, seven of the eight Islamic primary schools performed well in promoting integration and social cohesion in Dutch society. The eighth primary school – the Siddieq School, founded in 1989, was the only school that was cited as needing “a better balance between passing identity-bounded norms and values, and norms that ease the participation of pupils in Dutch society.”

It was an unfortunate situation in 2008 when the Dutch education ministry confirmed that 86 percent of Islamic schools had been using state funds fraudulently. Illegal expenditures uncovered in recent investigations included paychecks for wives of board members who pretended to be teachers, transportation that was never purchased or used, and plane tickets to Saudi Arabia for individuals completely unaffiliated with the schools. The education ministry is pursuing an estimated 4.5 million euros from schools. They have also pledged to increase state oversight of programs.

Such fraudulent behavior is blatantly un-Islamic and heavily undermines principles of Islamic education, the morale of Muslim minority and their impression in front of a supportive government. Islamic organizations, including schools, need to be specifically careful about who they choose as their leaders.

#### SPAIN:

Spain is a decentralized country with 17 autonomous Communities which have wide powers; for instance, health and education are managed at Community level. The majority of students (68.7 percent) in primary and secondary go to state schools. However, the share of grant-aided private education is relatively large (26.4 percent of all students); 4.9 per cent are in non-grant-aided private schools.<sup>128</sup> Grant-aided private education is composed of 70 per cent Catholic schools (Pépin, 2009, p. 78).

“The different laws on education (Ley Orgánica de Educación – LOE) recognize parents’ rights to educate their children according to their religious and moral beliefs (article 27.3 of the constitution); freedom of choice between state and private schools; and non-discrimination over access on ideological, religious, moral, social or racial grounds. The new LOE of 2006 aims to simplify all existing laws and now constitutes the legal framework for the Spanish education system. Its implementation over five years began in 2006/7” (Pépin, 2009).

An important step forward in terms of Islamic education in public schools was the 1992 cooperation agreement between the Spanish state and the Islamic Commission of Spain, which recognized, among

other things, the right to have Islam taught in state schools (similar agreements were reached in the same year regarding the Protestant and Jewish religions). However, although some progress has been made – for example, since 2005 the teaching of Islam has been provided in some state primary schools in Andalusia, Catalonia, and Madrid. For more than a decade, implementation of the agreement has been very weak and fraught with difficulties (Pépin, 2009, p. 30).

However, since the change in government in 2004, there has been a noticeable shift in Spain's approach to its Muslim minority. The new government has made efforts to implement the agreement and give equal treatment to Muslims in education. A pilot program of religious education is underway, with a more substantial implementation expected as more teachers are trained and other organizational difficulties are worked through.

Despite this, Muslims are arguing that Catholic schools receive preferential treatment in state support. This argument is supported by findings from Pepin (2009) who suggests: "As things stand, in spite of existing agreements, the Jewish, Protestant and Muslim faiths are not on the same footing as the Catholic religion. The Muslim religion suffers most clearly from this discrimination" (Pépin, 2009, p. 80).

## BELGIUM:

### PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In Belgium, the state supports instruction in any state recognized religion and non-denominational ethics, including Islam. The Muslim community, therefore, has the right to provide teachers at government expense for religious instruction.

Such instruction has been provided since the 1975–1976 school year, when salaried posts for Muslim teachers became legalized and available.

Since 1998, the Muslim Executive Council (MEC) in Belgium has facilitated the relationship between the state and public Islamic education. The state appoints teachers in Islam upon recommendation by the (MEC).

For many years, these teachers were contracted out by the embassies of the respective governments. Since 1986 all instructors of Islamic education in Belgium are required to have either Belgian nationality or a minimum of five years residency, demonstrate the ability to give instruction in either Dutch or French, and receive a diploma recognized by the Ministry of National Education (Merry & Driessen, 2005)

MEC also develops and submits curriculum to the state for approval.

Generally, the subjects taught include the Qur'an (with recitation), the fiqh (Islamic law and jurisprudence), the seerah (life of the Prophet and the period of the first four Caliphs), and Islamic dogma.

Belgian public school students under age 17 then have the option of participating in either the non-denominational ethics or religious classes offered, including those in Islam, however, the minimum threshold has to be researched for number of students.

Estimates suggest that roughly 40% of Muslim children attend Islamic instruction in state schools, while the majority attends the non-confessional ethics classes (Shadid & van Koningsveld, 1995). Many Muslim parents feel that these classes are lacking in substantive content (Merry & Driessen, 2005). Another possible reason for this is higher secularism among parents, particularly of those with Moroccan origins.

Beyond age 17, these classes are voluntary.

Islamophobia in schools is on the rise in Belgium in line with the recent trend across Europe. After France, there have been cases where Muslim girls were not only denied their head scarfs but also denied school entry based on length of their skirts with some reports suggesting students being asked to roll over sleeves and skirts or leave the school ("Belgian School Stirs Uproar Over Short Skirts," 2015; Dunya News, 2015; Tamli, 2015; TUNAKAN, 2015).

#### PRIVATE SCHOOLS

While Islamic education programs in Belgium's public schools have been developed, religious communities have also been given the right to establish private schools that are eligible for state funding.

Muslims are, therefore, allowed to establish schools with the same Belgian curriculum and under the supervision of Belgian authorities. These authorities also offer the salaries of the teachers in the Muslims schools.

The normal education in the Islamic schools is given in the French language, due to the large population of Moroccan and Tunisian pupils in these schools.

Currently, there are three primary Islamic schools in Brussels.

The first called Al-Ghazali was established in 1989, the second called the Pen (al Qalam) in 2011 and the third called Al Fadilah (Virtue) in 2013.

First Islamic school's opening was criticized by some politicians (Merry & Driessen, 2005) but their arguments were not found to have a solid ground in terms of Belgian constitution.

The three schools have around 800 pupils.

Amid growing demand for Islamic education, Belgium's first Islamic secondary school is going to open soon, accommodating scores of students who have been waiting for a place to pursue their studies. ("Belgium Gets First Islamic Secondary School," 2015)

"There is a strong demand for Islamic education among the Muslim community in Belgium but our schools regretfully cannot accommodate all the pupils and this year we have about 200 pupils who are waiting to find a place," Mohammad Allaf, secretary general of the six-member committee of Islamic education in Belgium, told KUNA news agency on Tuesday, September 1.

The new school will offer places for 144 boys and girls, who have already registered. Nevertheless, there is still a shortage of 40 places.

"But the philosophy of the education in our schools is our responsibility in order to teach Islamic religion and Arab culture to the pupils," Allaf said, noting that pupils in the Islamic schools celebrate all the Islamic holidays.

Two hours of special classes in the Arabic language are held after the normal school hours in the Islamic schools, but participation is voluntary.

"From this year, we have been allowed to open an Islamic school on the secondary level which will open on Thursday 3 September and will be called Al Fadilah 2. This is the first time that a secondary Islamic school will open in Belgium," said Allaf, who is a Belgian citizen of Moroccan origin.

A 4<sup>th</sup> primary Islamic school is expected to open in Forest in 2016 as currently Islamic schools do not meet the demand from Muslim parents ("The Brussels Times - Islamic schools turning pupils away," 2015).

In addition to these schools, there is also a non-recognized Islamic school located in Molenbeek, the Avicenna Islamic School, which receives no state subsidies. ("Islamleraars deelden lijfstraffen uit," 2008)

The school is theoretically open to Muslim and non-Muslim boys and girls, and the enrollment fee is 1,800 euros. It is not yet recognized by the state, so the school's diplomas have no official state value. Graduating students must first pass a test by the Belgian public examination board to receive an officially-recognized certificate.

According to De Standaard, the Islamic Platform League is the "driving force" behind the school. In its press release concerning the school's opening, the League stated that in no way did it intend for the Avicenna School to be a "ghetto school." Its mission is as follows: "to prepare the students for taking an active place in society, and ensure equal opportunities for emancipation for all students."

It is important to note that one parent interviewed by the internet news service Mediascrape decided to send his child to the private Islamic Avicenna Islamic School, citing his primary concern as being the poor quality of public schools in the neighborhood.

In Belgium, Islamophobia is growing and availability of Islamic education options accordingly receive much criticism. Politicians have also been observed passing statements considered inappropriate by the majority of Belgian Muslims.

"Worthy of mention here is the Vlaams Blok party. Owing to a strong cultural preservationist movement, the Blok has enjoyed unprecedented success for the past fifteen years. Much of its message has focused on the incompatibility of Islamic culture with western cultures and values. At times, its leaders have openly sought the deportation of Muslims to their countries of origin. It is largely in reaction to the anti-Muslim rhetoric of groups like the Blok that Muslims have begun to organize themselves"(Merry & Driessen, 2005)

## GREECE

According to Law 1566/85, one of the goals of both Primary and Secondary Education is "to have faith to the country and the genuine elements of the orthodox Christian tradition", and "to realize the

deeper meaning of the orthodox Christian ethos”(MAGHIOROS, 2010). Prevalent religion in state schools is accordingly Greek Orthodox.

Education for Muslims in Greece is heavily dominated by international political factors.

#### INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT:

The Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed between Greece and Turkey at the end of World War I, provides for the rights of the Greek minority in Istanbul and the Muslim minority in Western Thrace. This treaty dictates that public schools should be established for children from the Muslim community in Western Thrace.

#### MUSLIM ‘MINORITY’ SCHOOLS:

Currently, there are 235 minority primary schools in Greece (HRI, 2014). The minority schools function with a semi-autonomous status. Laws No. 694 and 695 of 1977 provide the basic provisions for the structure of minority education. Muslim minority consider ‘mixed’ approach to the administration as a tool to allow the state to interfere with the internal affairs of the minority without providing the necessary means of support (Boussiakou, 2007).

Instruction is in both Turkish and Greek in line with the treaty which allows education in mother-tongue (Boussiakou, 2007).

Western Thrace also maintains two high schools to prepare Muslim students for higher level studies in Islamic theology. However, such instruction has not been available for communities of Muslims outside Thrace. And although Muslims are allowed to opt out of instruction in Greek Orthodoxy, various organizational issues sometimes make this difficult.

The level of education provided to the Muslim students depends, on a legal and political level, on the standard of education provided for the Greek minority in Turkey on the basis of reciprocity. The principle of reciprocity upon which the minority educational system is based constitutes a serious obstacle to the constructive learning of Muslim students in minority schools. The text of the Treaty of Lausanne does not seem to correspond to the educational needs of the Muslim students.(Boussiakou, 2007)

Accordingly, the Muslim minority schools in Thrace are considered poor schools which often face closures (Boussiakou, 2007), and lack ability to meet labor market demands.

State-run secondary schools provide places for approximately 400 students, despite the fact that there are 8,500 students attending minority primary schools. The Greek government argues that, under the Treaty of Lausanne, they are only obliged to provide a bilingual education during primary school. According to modern needs, basic education is considered to be both primary and secondary. The shortage of spaces in the two minority high schools has effectively resulted in many students of the Muslim minority not completing the mandatory nine years of education, let alone entering higher education. (Boussiakou, 2007)

Due to this very low level of education provided in the minority schools, one of the most dramatic consequences is the high level of Muslim students who tend to drop out because of the burdensome and inappropriate educational practices. Many Muslim students leave school at an early stage or

choose to emigrate, usually to Turkey, due to the isolation they suffer in Greece from the general system of communication, including the Greek language, social values and the media (Boussiakou, 2007).

#### MUSLIMS STUDENTS AT NON-MINORITY SCHOOLS:

It is important to note that parents who are members of the minority have the option to register their children in Greek-speaking public schools. In the last few years, the 'elite' of the Muslim minority has increasingly been sending its children to non-minority schools.

The right of exemption from religious education, prayer and attending mass is recognized for non-Orthodox pupils, if they themselves (when they are adults) or their parents on their behalf request exemption for reasons of conscience (MAGHIOROS, 2010).

It is a common phenomenon, however, that if a Muslim family decides to register their children at a Greek public school, they face exclusion from the rest of the minority. Very few students, mostly those who live in urban centers, study in non-minority schools. Those students often experience a cultural conflict directly between their family and their community and indirectly between the family itself and the Muslim minority. (Boussiakou, 2007).

This decision could possibly be due to a lower level of educational standards in state-run minority schools. However, it often results in discrimination at schools.

Recently, the Greek government has attempted to improve the educational opportunities of the members of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace. Economic incentives, preferential admissions policies at universities, and quota systems for jobs and schools have been instituted. However, the schools remain in poor condition, leading many Muslim families to send their children to the general public schools.

#### PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

Private schools can be opened but do not get aided with grants. They are fully self-financed (MAGHIOROS, 2010).

#### AUSTRIA

One of Western Europe's most developed public Islamic education programs is in Austria, where religious education at public schools is a right of recognized churches and religious communities.

Dr. Jenny Berglund explains that religious education in Austria is compulsory in public schools with an opt-out option (Berglund, 2015). 13 recognized religious communities, including Islam, has right to provide confessional religious education in public schools.

Curriculum for all religious courses is, therefore, uniform and nationally approved, and the Austrian government provides funding for instruction. This regulation and financial support guarantee that religious education in Islam is not given outside the school in a way that evades the national educational system. As a result, only two of the 1,552 private schools are Islamic schools, and they are recognized in 2005-06 by the government as running in compliance with the Austrian Private School Law.

Austria, in accordance with above, has no problems with communities developing Islamic education programs outside of state regulations if running in compliance with relevant requirements.

Courses in Islam have been offered in Austrian public schools since 1983. The Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (IGGIÖ), which established Islamic instruction in public schools, serves as the liaison between the state and public schools—organizing teachers, developing instruction (in German), and giving lessons. According to the organization, the purpose of the program is to improve students' knowledge of Islam and to encourage them to reflect upon and discuss issues related to religious identity and living as a Muslim in Austria.

Recent counts had some 37,000 children participate in Islamic education programs at 2,700 public schools across Austria, taught by 350 teachers. These numbers continue to rise. Muslim pupils at public schools do not have to attend lessons on Muslim holidays.

Finding teachers qualified to give the religious instruction was found as a barrier to providing effective Islamic education in public schools.

Amidst growing Islamophobia, a proposed law in the country, however, is expected to put greater restriction on Muslims as compared to Jews and Christians which will require dissolving of all their institution with becoming part of IGGIO, inability to accept foreign donations and other restrictions which are not imposed on other religious communities.

Muslim groups say the ban on foreign funding is unfair as international support is still permitted for the Christian and Jewish faiths. Turkey's head of religious affairs, Mehmet Gormez responded to this with his comment: "Austria will go back 100 years in freedom with its Islam bill," ("Austria passes controversial reforms to 1912 Islam law," 2015)

SWEDEN:

SUBJECT ON RELIGION:

In Sweden, non-confessional religious education is one of a group of subjects in the core curriculum comprising history, geography, religion and civic education (Pépin, 2009, p. 26). Accordingly, teaching about religions is one of the compulsory subjects (Pépin, 2009, p. 84).

"The custom in Sweden is to organize teaching about religions not according to parents' wishes to bring their children up in their own tradition but according to the child's right to get a rounded view of different opinions and traditions. The tradition in Sweden is to show great respect for the student's own thinking and judgment" (Pépin, 2009, p. 85).

Though claimed to be 'non-confessional', we see the prevalence of Christianity in this 'compulsory' course on religion.

Pépin reports following curriculum aims for this course for students to:

- To reflect on, develop and deepen their knowledge of religious, ethical and existential questions as a basis for forming their own viewpoints;

- to deepen their knowledge of *Christianity* and the other major world religions and of religious representations from other religions, as well as their knowledge of non-religious conceptions of life;
- to understand how Swedish society has been *influenced by the Bible and the Christian faith*;
- to deepen their understanding and respect for the views of other people in religious and ethical questions;
- to appreciate the value of basic ethical principles

Pepin (2009) notes:

“It seems, however, that religious education in Sweden remains imbued with Christian/Lutheran concepts and approaches and that much remains to be done to ensure that teaching is really inclusive of religious diversity. According to Von Brömssen, ‘Traditions within other faith communities are still not much recognized in schools, which gives the impression that no other faiths or festivals are part of Swedish society..’ ”.

#### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

The great majority of Swedish students (more than 90 per cent) continue to attend state schools. In 2005/6, 8 percent of students in compulsory education (7–16 years) and 13 percent of students in upper-secondary attended independent private schools, grant-aided by the state (*fristaende skolor*) and organized by associations, foundations, enterprises or individuals. There are 800 grant-aided independent schools in compulsory education and upper-secondary. In Sweden, 67 primary schools and six secondary schools have a religious denominational character. (Pépin, 2009, p. 83)

#### INDEPENDENTLY RUN CONFESSIONAL SCHOOLS:

Sweden allows for independently run confessional schools, including that of Muslim religious schools. These schools are subject to follow guidelines, including the fundamentals of democracy and all world religions.

#### CONTROVERSIES:

A documentary in the spring of 2003 critiquing the educational practices of the free schools generated extensive debate. The National Agency for Education investigated the situation and found little evidence of misbehavior, but some of mismanagement. It responded by increasing its oversight of the schools.

#### SWITZERLAND:

##### MUSLIM POPULATION:

According to Cultural Association for Muslim Women in Switzerland, “The number of Muslims in Switzerland has increased from 20,000 in the 1970s to 50,000 in 1990s. A survey conducted in 2000 showed that the number had gone up to 310,000 representing five per cent of the total population of the country, mainly centering around Zurich” (Mussallam, 2003).

#### RELIGIOSITY:

Abdeleli, (2014) mentions the following about religiosity among Muslims in Switzerland:

“Religion isn’t the most important identifying factor for many of them. According to the report, only 12-15% actively practice the faith by regularly visiting a mosque, and Muslims from the Balkan region in particular see the religion as a tradition rather than a strict belief system” (Abdeleli, 2014).

#### ISLAMOPHOBIA:

According to International Human Rights Report (US Department of State, 2013b):

“Minority religious groups, mostly Muslims, complained of discrimination at the local governmental level”. One of such discriminations was reported to be refusal to approve zoning applications to build mosques or establish Islamic cemeteries.

Switzerland has a fraught relationship with Islam and made international headlines in 2009 with its “anti-minaret” referendum which saw almost 60 percent of voters backing a ban on the building of such towers (“Zurich pulls plug on Islamic kindergarten - The Local,” 2015)

“There were also reports of ‘societal’ discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Most incidents were directed against Muslims and Jews” (US Department of State, 2013b).

“In Wallis, a Catholic canton, an imam from Macedonia was denied a work permit

(to work as an imam in Switzerland) based in large part on the fact that the imam had studied in *Medina (Saudi Arabia)*; the cantonal authorities considered the imam a potential threat to religious peace” (Christine, 2008).

Other instances of Islamophobia include growing public aggression fueled by international events often not directly related to the local Muslim population. Some of other instances quoted as ‘Islamophobic’ include a ban on face veil in public, participation of Muslim girls in mandatory swimming classes, a ban on male circumcision, rejection of Muslim kindergarten from fear that it was going to be ‘too Islamic’, bullying in public schools etc.

#### RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION:

“Education policy is set at the cantonal level, but municipal school authorities have some discretion in its implementation. Most public cantonal schools offer religious education, with the exception of schools in Geneva and Neuchatel. Public schools normally offer classes in Catholic and Protestant doctrines; a few schools provide instruction on other religious groups in the country. Two municipalities in the canton of Lucerne offer religious classes in Islamic doctrine. In some cantons religious classes are voluntary, while in others they form part of the mandatory curriculum; however, waivers are routinely granted for children whose parents request them. Children from minority religious groups are free to attend classes for their own religious group during the class period. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by religious groups, or they may homeschool their children. A number of cantons either complement or replace traditional classes in Christian doctrines with nonconfessional teachings about religion and culture.

There are no national guidelines for waivers on religious grounds from classes other than religious instruction, and practices vary”(US Department of State, 2013b).

Private religious schools can be opened in Switzerland and can receive a certain amount of state funding (Matheson, Salganik, Phelps, & Perie, 1997, p. 228; OECD & Statistics, 2003, p. 87).

Supplementary schools, like many other EU countries, are found in Switzerland as well offering classes on weekends or in evenings.

#### ISSUES FACED IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION DELIVERY:

“In Switzerland, both school education and the regulation of the relationship between church and state is a cantonal matter. Furthermore, in many cantons established churches have historically had the right to organize their religious education in public classrooms. Despite the number of Muslims living in Switzerland having grown in recent decades, the introduction of IRE-classes remains an isolated phenomenon limited to a few local experiences” (Rota & Bleisch Bouzar, 2012).

The main issue faced by the Muslim community in terms of delivery of Islamic education in schools is a lack of availability of qualified teachers. Development of teacher and mechanisms to achieve is still a problem to be solved. Other factors that contribute to the scarcity of Islamic instruction in schools is financial instability of Muslim organizations who solely depend on donations and fear of Islamophobic reactions (J. Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, 2013, p. 638).

#### CYPRUS:

##### POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW:

Situated in the north-eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea and to the south of Turkey, Cyprus is the largest island in the eastern Mediterranean as well as being the third smallest country in the EU, after Malta and Luxembourg.

Cyprus has remained under dispute due to elements which want to join Turkey, called Turkish Cypriots, alongside other elements which claim attachment with Greek side, known as Greek Cypriots.

This ultimately led to the division of Cyprus where all Turkish Cypriots moved to the north and whereas Greek Cypriots concentrated in South.

#### NORTHERN CYPRUS:

Northern Cyprus, officially the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is a self-declared state that comprises the northeastern portion of the island of Cyprus. Recognised only by Turkey, Northern Cyprus is considered by the international community to be part of the Republic of Cyprus. However, its administration is widely accepted as de facto administration of Northern Cyprus.(EUCC, 2013).

One of the unique features about North Cyprus is the fact that while nearly all Turkish Cypriots are adherents of the Islamic faith, they favor a secular state (Emilianides, 2005).

The current government in Northern Cyprus, unlike its predecessor, is more inclined toward unification with south and restricting Turkish involvement and its pro-Islamic Agenda (Kyris, 2015).

In line with this secular approach, any effort to infuse Islamic culture faces strong opposition, for instance, first Islamic theological college in Northern Hala Sultan (KP DAILY NEWS, 2014; World Bulletin, 2013).

Accordingly, there is not much thirst for Islamic education among most of the Northern Cypriots.

#### SOUTHERN CYPRUS:

On the Southern side, there are hardly any Muslims.

#### DENMARK:

##### PUBLIC SCHOOLS

From study conducted by Llorent-Bedmar & Cobano-Delgado (2014) we come to know the following:

- In Denmark, during the period of compulsory education (folkeskole) which spans the ages from 6 to 16, religious education is designated a compulsory subject and is called “Christian Studies” in line with state’s support for the church in terms of moral and financial support.
- In the first and sixth years it consists of 60 hours’ classroom attendance, while it is 30 hours in the rest, with the exception of the preparation-for-confirmation year, usually the seventh, in which the subject is not taught.
- In secondary education between the ages of 16 and 19, religious education is also a compulsory subject. It is anticipated that pupils’ parents can ask for an exemption. An alternative is offered in a very small number of schools (only 41 of the 3,171 primary schools).

‘Christian studies’ subject has traditionally been taught on an Evangelical Lutheran basis, with the addition of elements about other religions including Islam. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from Christian studies on religious grounds, and some Muslim parents do so.

Muslim organizations have suggested that there should be cooperation between the education ministry and their organizations in Islamic curriculum development, but as of this writing, this had not yet taken place.

##### PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

According to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark, n.d.)

The public system allows for groups of parents to establish ‘independent schools’ which are entitled to state subsidies to cover most of their budget (up to 80%).

The first Muslim independent school was established in 1978. In 2006-2007, there were 22 independent Muslim primary schools with a total of approximately 3,600 pupils, all with Muslim backgrounds. Many of the independent schools offer Arabic and Islamic studies.

A study carried out by the Ministry of Education in 2006 found that a high percentage (41%) of the pupils in Muslim independent schools progressed into upper secondary school, against a national average of 26%.

#### FUNDING:

There are 18 Islamic schools in Denmark, about half of which are located in Copenhagen, and state funding covers up to 60 percent of the schools' expenses. Parents pay the remainders of the schools' costs each month.

In 2002, the requirements for private school state funding were amended to ensure funded schools prepare students to "live in a society characterized by freedom and democracy." Regulation and supervision were also increased, and private schools were required to hew more closely to the public school curriculum. This caused protests among independent schools.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION:

Most mosques and Muslim associations provide some form of Islamic instruction outside school hours.

#### NORWAY:

##### MUSLIM DEMOGRAPHICS:

Islam is the second largest religion in Norway after various forms of Christianity, with 132,135 Muslims present in the country ("Religious communities and life stance communities, 1 January 2014," 2014).

The majority of Muslims in Norway are Sunni, with a significant Shia minority.

The biggest group of immigrant Muslims in Norway come from Pakistan, followed by Turks and Moroccans (Aslan, 2009, p. 302).

##### ORGANIZATION OF MUSLIMS:

Though most Muslim organizations in Norway have remained ethnic-based, the trend is gradually changing with formation of Muslim youth and student organizations, women organization and Islamic council of Norway – all working without consideration to ethnic origins (Aslan, 2009, p. 304)

#### RELIGIOSITY:

There is a high level of polarization in terms of religiosity among Muslim in Norway.

In a research survey, 27% of Muslims responded that they attended religious ceremonies monthly or more frequently with other Muslims. 31% said that they never attend such events.

#### SCHOOLING OPTIONS:

##### **Private schools:**

From J. S. Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, Maréchal, & Moe (2009, pp. 260–261), we come to know that there are very few private schools in Norway reflecting the success of ‘one school for all’ policy (only 2.2% children go to private schools).

The government provides substantial funding for private schools but has strict criteria regarding who can establish private schools and why. Religious organizations are allowed to open private schools. Most private schools are run by minority faith groups, however, there was only 1 Islamic school reported to be operating in 2003-2004 (Lauglo, 2010).

### **Compulsory Subject on Religion in Public Schools:**

In 1997, a school subject “Christianity, Religion and Philosophies of Life” (KRL) was made compulsory for all children to attend. Many parents complained about its strong tilt towards Christianity against their will. This got escalated to an extent that it was discussed in the UN Human Rights Committee and then being redefined as Religion, Philosophies of life and Ethics (RLE) with new rules governing exemptions (Götke & Nissen, 2012).

### **SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOLS:**

From Aslan (2009), we come to know the following:

- Most mosques operate some form of Quranic schools with some of them teaching formal curricula spanning across a number of various subjects.
- Some of these supplementary schools offer classes in evenings whereas other operate on weekends and include some socializing activities as well. Some schools lend help with homework as well.
- Quite a reasonable population of Muslim children attend such schools.

## **ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN COUNTRIES WITH LESS THAN 100,000 MUSLIM POPULATION**

### **ROMANIA**

Islam in Romania is followed by a minority these days, but has 700 years of tradition in Northern Dobruja, a region on the Black Sea coast which was part of the Ottoman Empire for almost five centuries (ca. 1420-1878). In present-day Romania, most adherents to Islam belong to the Tatar and Turkish ethnic communities and follow the Sunni doctrine.

### **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN CURRICULUM:**

RE is a part of the curricula domain "Human beings and Society". The RE syllabuses have a confessional character and are organized according to a scheme that is given by the Ministry of Education.

The legal status of this discipline offers to all students, in pre-university education, the opportunity to attend RE classes, having the freedom, according to the Constitution, to attend or not these classes (“Romania - International Religious Freedom Report,” 2005).

Education Law no. 84/1995 stipulates that RE teaching in primary education is compulsory, optional in secondary school and an elective in high school and vocational schools. There is one hour of RE per week.(Tomoioaga, 2009)

The decision to opt out is rare, because 99% of the population belongs to a confession or a religion.

For each new school year, parents choose which confessional RE their child will attend and this does not have to be their own confession.

#### DELIVERY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

All confessions and religious communities that are accredited by the state are eligible for state support; they have the right to establish schools, teach religion in public schools, receive government funds to build religious places, pay clergy salaries with state funds and subsidize clergy's housing expenses, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, apply for broadcasting licenses for denominational frequencies, and enjoy tax-exempt status ("Romania - International Religious Freedom Report," 2005).

Islam is one of the 18 recognized religions/ cults in the country (Aslan, 2009, p. 398).

#### REPORTS AND ISSUES RELATED TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:

From US State Government's International Religious Freedom Report, we find out following reports/cases of discrimination in religious education:

- While the law permits instruction according to the faith of students' parents, some minority recognized religious groups complain that they were unable to have classes offered in their faith in public schools.
- According to minority religious groups, the local inspectors for religion classes are typically Orthodox priests who deny accreditation to teachers of other religions.
- In some cases, school directors denied access in their schools to teachers of certain religions.
- Religious teachers are permitted to instruct only students of the same religious faith. However, minority religious groups credibly asserted that there were cases of children pressured to attend classes of Orthodox religion.
- It was also reported that at some festivities in public schools, all students, irrespective of their religious affiliation, must attend Orthodox religious services.

According to Leşcu & Demirgian (2014):

"Taught in Romanian schools throughout the undergraduate years, religion as a school subject has come under criticism from both some of the parents and part of civil society, on grounds of the freedom of religious belief. There are parents who do not want their children to take religion classes because they belong to a different religion than that being taught in schools, or because they do not hold religious beliefs or simply because they think certain parts of the textbooks may have a negative impact on their children.

Many parents, however, are not sure whether the law allows them to withdraw their children from religious education lessons or how this can be done.”

#### SECULARISM AMONG YOUNGER GENERATION:

There is a high level of secularism in the younger generation which causes divide and tension between them and the previous generation which believes that they have cut off from the religion and values they belong to (Aslan, 2009).

#### ONLINE ISLAMIC SCHOOL:

Muslim community opened an online Islamic school in Romania in 2009 in order to serve Muslim community living at various geographical locations (“Online Islam School for Romania Muslims,” 2009). Muslim converts and some Muslim organizations are found to be actively engaged in Dawah work (Górak-Sosnowska, 2011, p. 269).

#### SLOVENIA

Muslims comprise of 2.4% of Slovenian population however, some researchers argue that actual number could possibly be higher due to certain factors in which survey was conducted (Aslan, 2009, p. 475).

#### OVERVIEW OF RE:

Ivanc (2010) highlights following perspective about education in Slovenia:

- Up until today, 99% of all schools in Slovenia are public schools. With regard to elementary schools, there are only three private schools (the Waldorf School and two catholic schools) among 802 elementary compulsory public schools. There are also six private and 158 public upper secondary schools.
- According to the Education Act, religious communities may establish kindergartens and schools under the same conditions as other private law subjects. Private educational institutions may be financed in two ways: they are either granted licenses or financed directly under the statute. In order to receive a license the private school or kindergarten has to include itself in the public network and execute only a public programme. Non-licensed private kindergartens, private elementary and music schools and private general secondary schools (but not also professional schools), which carry out public programmes and comply with statutory conditions, have the right to public funds to the extent of 85% of the funds that the State or local community designate for salaries and material costs per student in public schools.
- According to constitution, denominational activities are not permitted in public kindergartens and schools or in licensed kindergartens and schools. Such denominational activities include religious lessons or denominational religious lessons aimed at raising students in that religion, lessons in which a religious community decides on the substance, textbooks, teachers' education and the suitability of individual teachers for teaching and organized religious rites.

- The legislator's approach of ensuring only negative neutrality in public (and also in private) schools was heavily inspired by the idea of strict or negative *Läicité* (ideological secularism) and its negative perception of religion.
- Non-confessional religious and ethics education is provided as an optional subject. Religious communities have no involvement in contents for this course.

The non-confessional religious subject is not expected to fulfill religious and spiritual needs of Muslim community due to the manner in which information, very brief in nature, is presented e.g. description of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as "inventor" of the Islamic faith.(Aslan, 2009, p. 486)

Laws allow religious communities to establish private Islamic schools but Islamic community in Slovenia does not have human and financial resources to be able to start such venture (Aslan, 2009, p. 490).

There are many confessional weekend schools running in the country which provide classes on the weekend and one weekday evening (Aslan, 2009, p. 488). Number of attendees is encouraging.

## CROATIA

In the Croatian educational system in the 1990s, religious education of all confessions became a part of the Croatian school curriculum, where education legislative permits confessional religious education in preschool, primary and secondary education, as an elective subject.

Some studies indicate that around 87% of primary and 80% of secondary school students take the course every school year (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

In public school, a minimum number of 7 minority religion students willing to attend RE is required for teaching to be organized. If the number is lesser, option is available for teaching through the religious community ( US Senate - Committee on Foreign Relations, 2005, p. 310).

In line with majority religious affiliation, the Catholic church has a strong presence in the educational system. Catholic priests sit in committees for approving the history textbooks with which they are enforcing their religious views and religion, therefore, has a significant position in the education Croatian pupils receive (Topić, 2012).

There are religious pre-schools in the country but no religious primary school. There are 10 catholic grammar schools and 2 secondary schools of other religions (Marinović-Jerolimov, 2005) with one known to have an affiliation with the Islamic community.

This secondary school is running at its full capacity and Muslim community, though small and dispersed across the country, has shown aims to establish higher education institution at one end and offer Islamic kindergarten classes in Zargeb mosques at the other hand (US Senate - Committee on Foreign Relations, 2005, pp. 310–311).

Only Catholic schools are fully funded by the state. The others receive only partial funding: although there is no official regulation on this, the Ministry argues that a number of at least 150 pupils is needed to apply for full public funding (Topić, 2012).

## IRELAND

Education in Ireland is generally segregated on the basis of religion and supports the concept of faith-specific schools causing lesser opposition to creation of Islamic schools, unlike most of the other European countries (Aslan, 2009, p. 204).

The Catholic Church runs more than 90 percent of all public schools. Other religious groups operate another 6 percent (Schrack, 2013). Parents accordingly report a lack of availability of non-Catholic schools in many communities, as reported by Schrank.

The Irish Constitution states in Article 42.1. “The State acknowledges that the primary educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.”

State accordingly guarantees parents right to choose a religious education for their children.

“Irish primary schools are essentially publicly funded, but privately run. The government pays for school construction; teacher salaries and grants based on school enrollment, but private groups—mostly required to teach a standard state curriculum, and 30 minutes per day is set aside for religious instruction. For the vast majority of children who attend Catholic schools, that means preparation for Communion and Confirmation is part of the state-sanctioned school day—an unwelcome reality for some parents” (Schrack, 2013).

The muslim community in line with their constitutional right to receive state support, has found Irish educational system to be very supportive and positive.

First Muslim school in Ireland was established in Dublin after a series of meeting with government officials and community engagement. Government throughout the process remained very supportive and was duly appreciated by the Muslim community. The school opened its doors in 1990 with 41 children and since then, has expanded rapidly. In 1993, due to high number of enrollments, school building became inadequate.

## FINLAND:

Compared to many other European countries the current Muslim population in Finland is relatively small—40–45,000 persons or approximately 0.8% of Finland’s 5.4 million inhabitants.

Dr. Jenny Berglund explains religious education situation in Finland as follows:

In Finland, religious education (RE) is a compulsory school subject in both comprehensive (7–16 years) and upper-secondary school (16–18/19 years).

The Finnish RE model enables pupils to follow the religious education of their own denomination.

In 2004 Finnish RE was changed from a confessional to a non-confessional school subject taught “in accordance with the pupil’s own religion.” This categorical change also has been described as “weak confessional,” with “confessional” referring to the fact that both the pupils in the classroom and the curriculum reflect a common worldview.

Whereas Lutheran Religious Education (LRE) is taught in all schools, alternate RE is offered only if the municipality or town contains a minimum of three pupils that are members of one of Finland's registered religions, and if parents demand that religious education in their specific tradition be offered to their children.

Those that desire general RE not connected to any particular religion are given the option of a course in "Ethics"—a subject that is arguably more neutral, but that can include teaching about religion.

Currently, there are 13 registered religious education curricula in Finland's comprehensive schools and ten such curricula in its upper secondary schools.

Muslim students in Finland are to receive Islamic religious education (IRE) within the state school system with a non-confessional curriculum, meaning that the IRE orientation in public schools is educational rather than religious.

According to the Finnish National Board of Education, experiential forms of learning and ways of familiarizing students with different forms of religious practice are needed, but all learning activities are to be enacted on established pedagogical grounds.

According to the new comprehensive IRE curricula, the purpose of IRE is to strengthen the pupil's Islamic identity and their understanding of the significance of Islam for themselves and for society. Students are also taught to understand and interact with persons holding different worldviews, something that is stressed in all Finnish RE curricula.

Recent research on IRE in Finland indicates that the country's model safeguards the rights of Muslim minorities and significantly contributes to the development of a Muslim identity. It also encourages Muslim students' commitment to and participation in Finnish society.

In her study of IRE in Finland, Finnish researcher Inkeri Rissanen has shown that IRE teachers are deeply involved in developing a representation of Islam appropriate for a liberal educational context, and that pedagogical and ideological negotiations are prioritized over theological differences in decisions on this matter.

She has also shown that, due to their ability to identify with both groups, IRE teachers sometimes serve as cultural interpreters in practical discussions between immigrant Muslim families and school personnel.

Rissanen notes that teachers manage the sometimes problematic diversity of interpretations of Islam by focusing on aspects that are shared by most Muslims. However, this is also sometimes challenging due to parents' diverse cultural backgrounds. Muslim parents and pupils viewed the existence of IRE as recognition of Islam in Finnish society and acknowledgment of Muslim identities in Finnish schools.

Rissanen concludes that providing religious education that is in keeping with the students' religion supports integration by affording religious traditions a tangible role in education—i.e., religious persons are integrated not only as individuals but also as a part of the country's institutional infrastructure.

In Finland, there are almost no private schools except a handful of religiously affiliated ones which provide state-sponsored education as well (Vasagar, 2010).

## PORTUGAL

### MUSLIM POPULATION:

According to PEW research 2010, the number of Muslims in Portugal is around 30,000. However, other more recent sources claim this number to be between 48,000 to 55,000 (Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, 2014, p. 517) in which around 8000 are Ismailia (an extreme Shia sect).

### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM:

Country upholds the principle of religious freedom and changes to the law in 2006 have enabled Muslim organizations to function in a more stable manner.

### FORMAL AND INFORMAL ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION:

From study conducted by Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, we find out the following:

- Until the 1980s the transmission of religious ideas was mainly a family responsibility. They would be helped by private tutors who would organize informal collective classes to teach the recitation of the Qur'an, ethics, and ritual aspects (teaching how to pray, for instance).
- With the creation of the main mosques in Almada, Odivelas and Lisbon, religious education became increasingly institutionalized. Currently, most mosques and prayer halls organize public Islamic instruction classes on weekends. Mosque provides instruction in the language of the majority of local community e.g. Bangla in some instances.
- Mosques also organize Islamic education summer programmes
- The Law of Religious Freedom allows Islamic instruction in public schools, depending on the number of pupils/parents who require it (minimum ten). In practice, there is currently no public school in Portugal with enough Muslim pupils of more or less the same age who could benefit from this offer. The parents do not complain about the lack of such service, as their children attend the instruction in the Qur'anic classes.
- A recognized, private secondary Islamic school exists in Palmela (in Lisbon metropolitan area). It has 200 pupils, with nearly 10% of them being non-Muslims and it runs both a secular and a religious curricula. In 2009, it achieved the status of being the best school in the national ranking of public and private secondary schools. According to Tiesler & Cairns (2007), the school also offers primary education. Part of the tuition fees for this school can be deducted in taxes, depending on the family income, and, as of 2011, the school is part of the Cambridge International Curriculum.
- Classes and education are not only restricted to Islamic education but other subject areas such as alphabetisation, language classes (Portuguese or, in the case of children e.g. from Guinea Conakry, French) and general capacity training (computer courses etc.). These classes not only benefit children but also recent adult migrants and accordingly play their role in improved societal integration.
- Informal and mosque institutions are also run by Ismaili sect

- Another educational institution is the Darul'ulum Kadria-Ashrafijia de Odivelas which is part of the Association for the Islamic Education in Portugal. It reproduces a South Asian Sufism inspired version of Islam, namely Barelvia.

## LUXEMBOURG

“Luxembourg does not have an Established Church, and Articles 19 & 20 of the Constitution guarantee freedom of religion and of public worship and declare that no-one may be obliged to participate in the acts and ceremonies of a religion or to observe its days of rest. However, Article 106 provides that “The salaries and pensions of ministers of religion shall be borne by the State and regulated by the law”. In order to qualify for state funding, a religious group must establish an official and stable representative body with which the Government can interact” (Cranmer & Pocklington, 2015).

### MUSLIM DEMOGRAPHICS:

Muslim minority population statistics vary according to various reports<sup>1</sup> and some estimates suggest that numbers up to 10,000 people.

However, Islam is now the second religion in Luxembourg, after Catholicism. There are currently five mosques in Luxembourg: Mamer (which is also home to the Islamic cultural center), Niederkorn, Esch-sur-Alzette, Wiltz and Bonnevoie in Luxembourg City and (Wort Newspaper, 2014b).

According to reports, a series of lectures in public schools was organized by Government through a Muslim scholar to avoid negative reactions after acts of terrorism in America (which were clearly marked as un-Islamic by the majority of Muslim scholars including the lecturer). This is reported to have resulted in a positive change of general perception about Islam and Muslims. (EUMC, 2001)

### LOWER EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS:

“Luxembourg ranked last in public education among all OECD countries according to the last two reports from OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Both reports emphasized the selective character of Luxembourgian education and its socially unjust character, which exacerbates social inequalities instead of reducing them. The result is an excessive number of failures. Indeed, at the age of 15, half of the children will have repeated a class at least once. Part of the problem is also due to Luxembourg's trilingual instruction. Proficiency in Luxembourgian, German, and French—all three languages are used in the education system—is required for graduation from secondary school, but half the students leave school without a certified qualification. Often, Luxembourgian children, whose mother tongue is Luxembourgian, a German dialect, encounter difficulties in French, whereas the children of immigrants often fail German-language courses. Since German courses are based on an extensive knowledge of Luxembourgian, which foreign children often do not have, they face a structural disadvantage.” (Kollwelter, 2007)

### FUTURE OF RE IN SCHOOLS:

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<sup>1</sup> It is illegal for Government to obtain religious statistics since 1979 (“RECUEIL DE LEGISLATION - Service central de législation,” 1979)

In recent times, the state is distancing itself from religion and moving more toward secular French model.

Iona Institute of Religion and Society (2015) describes current plan as follows:

“Luxembourg is to ban religious education in State schools irrespective of the wishes of parents. The move in the Catholic-majority country will see religion classes in schools replaced with lessons on ethics and morals, to include classes on world religions.

The shift, which has been compared to a move towards the secular French model between church and state, comes as a result of a new funding agreement drawn up between the government and faith groups. Under this, state subsidies once paid to established religions will end or be curtailed. Luxembourg will continue to pay stipends towards supporting currently serving priests, for example, but will offer no future payments to clerics now information.”

Recognition of Muslim Community and its potential role in future of RE in Schools:

Muslim organizations were previously not included in this stipend payment scheme but have recently been included (Cranmer & Pocklington, 2015).

We get further details on this from information presented by Wort (2015):

- “Luxembourg's Muslim Community has spoken of its joy at having the Islamic faith recognized in Luxembourg after a 17-year struggle, calling it the "dawn of a new era"
- The government has reformed its faith group subsidies and approved funding for Muslims for the first time.
- “The Shoura, representative body of the Muslim community in Luxembourg, mentioned in their January 2015 press release: "By this act, the Shoura has finally obtained the recognition of the Muslim faith after a seventeen-year struggle. From this day on, the Muslim faith will be placed on equal footing with the other major world religions recognized by Luxembourg,”
- It means that Luxembourg's Muslims will become part of the “Conseil des Cultes Conventionnés”, a body representing recognized faith groups in Luxembourg. “This body will take part in defining the curriculum for a new common subject to be introduced in schools known as “an education to ethics”. Thus, there arises an opportunity for Muslims to work together with other religions, allowing them to get to know one another better, as well as a chance to make Islam better known and understood”

#### PRIVATE SCHOOLING

Public and private secondary schools are harmonized and the law provides state subsidies for private schools, in return for allowing the state to supervise their curricula and their teachers' qualifications (Hansen, 1997, p. 19).

The government subsidizes all private religious schools affiliated with a parent religion that has a signed a convention with the state (“LUXEMBOURG,” 2012).

#### CZECH

#### RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE:

Dr. Emily O'Dell, a renowned educationalist, defined religiosity in the Czech Republic as follows (Emily Jane O'Dell, 2011):

“Czech Republic is frequently referred to as the most atheistic country in the world. In fact, widespread atheism is what some fear make the Czechs and Slovaks ripe for conversion to Islam, while others fear that the prevalence of atheism in these countries provides a fertile breeding ground for Islamophobia, due to widespread antipathy for religion as a whole—not just necessarily for Islam.”

#### MUSLIM COMMUNITY:

According to some estimates, there are around 20,000 Muslims in Czech. Most of Muslims in Republic are highly educated and work in professional fields such as medicine and engineering (Emily Jane O'Dell, 2011).

Czech Muslims face a lot of discrimination at various levels in society.

The CZECH Republic, in line with the second opinion mentioned above from Dr. Emily O'Dell, is known for its widespread Islamophobia at the state level and all the way down with numerous instances making their way to international news (Cameron, 2015; Emily Jane O'Dell, 2011; Pitt, 2014).

#### EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

“The Czech education system is jointly managed by the central government, the 14 regions, which enjoy considerable autonomy, and the local communities. The latter is responsible for school education (compulsory education from 6 to 15 years – Základní škola); they set up the schools and administer them. The head of the school is responsible for the quality of education in the school and for financial management. He or she hires and fires the teachers. The government fixes the main objectives of the education system and its general content, along with the competences to be acquired. These are defined in the Framework Education Programme, which serves as a reference to the schools for the development of their own programmes; it is responsible for teacher-training and the School Register. A school, whether state or private, is only constituted after it has been added to the Register”. (Pépin, 2009, pp. 60–61)

#### RELIGION IN SCHOOLS:

Following are some of the key points from information on Czech republic's RE provided by Pépin (2009):

- “Teaching about religions in state schools is at two levels: a distinction has to be made between teaching about religion and confessional religious education”
- Teaching about religions, or about knowledge of religions, takes the same approach as in France with the teaching of religious facts, and is integrated into the various compulsory disciplines, mainly history, geography, civic education and intercultural education, defined in the Framework

Programme for Basic Education adopted in 2007. Its target is knowledge, not beliefs (non-confessional).

- Confessional religious education has optional status. It is taught outside the time allotted to compulsory and optional subjects. With this status, the time allotted to the subject depends on each head teacher. Lessons in religion are no more than one hour a week.
- Making use of the specific rights they have been granted, the churches and religious associations organize religious education in state schools. The different confessions are responsible for the content and quality of this education and organize the registration of students. There must be at least seven students interested before a course can be set up (this can consist of students from different year groups, and several schools can group together as long as the number in the group is no greater than 30 students). It is the head teacher's responsibility to ensure that all the conditions for setting up such a course are met.

#### ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

An effort was made in 2012 to introduce Islam to Czech children in the spirit of promoting multiculturalism, inclusiveness, and tolerance. The project received support from the Czech Education Ministry and while it was voluntary, schools were expected to make wide use of it in promoting a greater understanding of foreign cultures (Freeman, 2012). However, Education minister faced pressure from right-wing Islamophobic activists and accordingly withdrew support from project leaving public system void of any specific information on Islam. However, under the new Czech framework programme for basic education, adopted in 2007, Islam is touched upon under the subject "knowledge of religions" (Pépin, 2009, p. 24).

Religious schools, including Islamic one, can receive government's financial support to a limited extent (Pépin, 2009, p. 24).

#### REPUBLIC ESTONIA

From research by Kiviorg (2010) we note:

- Religious following in Estonia is very low as compared to other European states (29% in the year 2000)
- "The Estonian school system consists mainly of state and municipal schools. Thus, the primary place for religious education is in public schools. Religious education in Estonia is a voluntary, non-confessional (non-denominational) subject. As to the typology of RE, it is intended to be a mix of teaching about religions and ethics".
- Confessional religious education is provided for children by Sunday schools and church schools operated by congregations. Religious organizations can set up private educational institutions. Such schools do not need a license.
- Number of schools providing option religious education or a related subject is very low. Schools are required to provide religious education subject if at least 15 students demand it.

There is no alternative subject to RE for the pupils who don't attend the RE classes to gain knowledge or become informed about world religions and ethics.

From ENAR report on racism in Estonia, we find out:

- "According to some estimates, there were around 4500 Muslims in Estonia in 2010 with a few hundred of them being practicing".
- "Registration of religious groups is regulated by the Churches and Congregations Act and is carried out through the courts. Formal registration is mandatory. It allows the religious group to conduct marriages with civil validity, to benefit from tax exemptions and to establish private schools"
- "Estonian Muslims established their own premises in 2009, purchased with money from a Saudi sponsor. The center hosts an Islamic cultural center Turath, library, room for lectures, prayer room and the office of the Imam. Several smaller centers are located in Tallinn and also nearby Maardu. Some years ago there were discussions about the construction of a mosque in Tallinn, but permission was not granted".

## SLOVAKIA

Religious education is provided in public schools by officially registered religious organizations. However, Muslims are not registered due to certain legislative conditions which exclude them from this right and hence there is no Islamic education in public schools (J. Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, 2014b, p. 543).

According to some estimates, the number of Muslims in the country is up to 0.2% (PEW Research Centre, 2012) or approximately 10,000.

"The country remains the only European Union member state without a single mosque. It is difficult to determine the exact number, since Islam is not registered by the state as a recognized religion in Slovakia. The Muslim community here includes both foreign and domestic believers. In 2007, the Slovak parliament changed the law so that at least 20,000 members are required for recognition. This is impossible for a Muslim community of 5,000 people." ("Muslim community believes, even without mosque," 2013)

Several applications were made for the building of mosques but none of them could be successful. According to reports, the land was already purchased for mosques which was also supposed to house a primary Islamic school. But according to our literature review, the construction could not be started due to various opposing factors. ("First mosque planned for Slovakia," 2014, "The Phobia of New Things," 2000)

In recent times as well, Slovakia has continued to show a very unwelcoming approach towards Islam. One such instance was refusal to accept Muslim migrants with the justification that the country has no mosques. (Masroor, 2015; RT News, 2015; "'We have no mosques' Slovakia says it prefers Christian refugees," 2015)

A preference is given to Christian migrants though the constitution requires an anti-discriminatory approach based on religion.

The Council of Europe Secretary-General, Thorbjorn Jagland, called for the Slovakian government's policy to be reversed.

"Refusing refugees on the grounds of their religion would be a blatant discrimination. Especially, during this unprecedented refugee crisis, there must be no place for xenophobia and discrimination. Europe must show solidarity with these vulnerable people," Jagland said in a statement.

## POLAND

### RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE:

Poland is conventionally perceived as one of the most religious countries in contemporary Europe.

Poland is overwhelming Christian majority and it is believed that "In a nation that's more than 90 percent Roman Catholic, it's hard to be different. Some argue that it's even harder because of a new Education Ministry policy that expands the teaching of religion in public schools." (Myers, 1992)

### EQUAL RIGHTS FOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS:

According to the Constitution, all religious groups have equal rights in Poland; however, there are differences in regulations concerning the legal position of the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations. The legal position of the former is regulated by the international agreement between the Polish state and the Holy See. The legal position of other religious organizations can be regulated by signing bilateral agreements with the Polish state. In practice, only 14 historical religions have such separate acts. The legal status of other religious organizations functioning legally in Poland is regulated by registration with the Register of Churches and Other Denominations, on the basis of conditions stipulated in the Law on Guaranteeing Freedom of Conscience and Belief. Currently, there are 157 religious organizations of various sizes and diverse religious traditions recorded in the Registry (Zielin'ska & Zwierzdzyński, 2013).

### CHRISTIANITY STUDIES IN STATE SCHOOLS:

In the 1990s, Church utilized its influence on the state in attempting to impose Christian values and norms on the entire society as well as for intervening in the political and public affairs of the newly constructed democratic state (Zielin'ska & Zwierzdzyński, 2013). A part of this effort was the introduction of Christian education in state schools.

Some believe that, "Although unwanted by most parents, Catholic Religious Education (catechism) has been inserted stepwise into Polish state schools. In June 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that this violated religious freedom" ("Creeping evangelisation in state schools," 2013).

### ALTERNATE TO CHRISTIANITY STUDIES:

Concordat Watch claims that alternate to this Christian teaching, "Ethics" is either unavailable at many places or taught by priests.

A recent controversy arose when a priest shows ISIS beheading video in religious education class which left many children in a highly stressful state (Wyborcza, 2015).

### PARENTS' CHOICE REGARDING CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION:

According to Article 53 of constitution, parents have the right to religious and moral upbringing and teaching of their children in accordance with their convictions.

All religious organizations officially recognized by the state have the right to organize R.E. in schools, under the condition that schooling does not violate other people's freedom of religion and conscience.

The state does not generally interfere with curricula offered which is considered an internal matter of religious organizations which can run schools and seminaries under certain legal obligations and provisions.

Private (non-public) schools, mostly fee-based, can regulate their religious education classes and curricula with little or no influence from the state (Zielin'ska & Zwierzdzyński, 2013).

#### MUSLIM COMMUNITY AND ISLAMIC INSTRUCTION:

Though there is very little formal organization of Muslims working on religious education in a systematic manner, one significant effort was formation of Islamic studies curriculum for teaching in schools (generally offered on Sundays at limited places) initiated by Imams and teachers in liaison with Mufti of Poland ("ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN POLAND," 2015).

According to Muslim Center in Kraków (2014):

Muslims in Poland are a very small minority. Today the approximate statistics of the Muslim population in Poland are as follows:

Tatars – 5.000

Foreign Muslims – 25.000

New Polish Muslims – between 500 and 1.000.

Most of the remaining Tatar Muslims have very limited understanding of religion, mainly due to the lack of Islamic educational establishments. The two old Tatar mosques are used mostly for Eid festivals and cultural gatherings rather than day to day worship and educational activities.

The reestablishment of Islamic activities began through the contact with Muslims coming mostly from the Arab world. The first active group that started serious da'wah work were the students. In 1989, they formed the "Muslim Students Society in Poland". Amongst other things, they established some elementary Islamic education for the Tatar children.

However *there aren't any Imams or scholars who would have good knowledge of Islam*, the Polish language and who would have an understanding of the broader Polish society.

There is no formal Muslim educational institution. However, there is some informal Islamic education for children in many cities. The number of participants varies from 40 to 150 persons, with the greatest number in Białystok and the surrounding area.

Sunni Muslims lack organizational representation in the country and only 2 out of 5 registered Muslim organizations are Sunni (Górak-Sosnowska, 2011, p. 189).

Muslim organizations can legally accept foreign donations. However, such donations are not very frequently provided to them and despite the number of Muslims claimed to be approximately 20000, only 1 mosque could be built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## HUNGARY

Religious education is an optional subject in public schools. Hungary is a secular state and requires schools to be neutral in religious and world views issues but provide space for religious education.

From US State Government report (US Department of State, 2012), we find out that registered churches and religious associations in Hungary have the right to provide religious education in public schools if requested by students or parents. Religious instruction is not part of the curriculum in public schools, but the government permits primary and secondary school students to enroll in extracurricular religious education classes.

Everything beyond the provision of space for conducting religious education is the domain of churches or recognized religious organizations. They are responsible for the syllabuses, textbooks, the content of teaching, training and employment of teachers, supervision, examinations, announcements, registration etc.

Confessional RE, as discussed, is taught is an optional (Marianna, 2006) and alternative, 'Ethics' is supposed to be provided for those who opt out (MTI, 2012).

Optional religious instruction is usually held after the normal school day and taught in school facilities by representatives of various religious groups. The four "historic" churches provide the majority of after-hours religious instruction. Private schools are not obligated to provide religious education. Religious organizations can also make agreements with governments to run state schools based on certain conditions. The Roman Catholic Church took over 63 institutions, the Reformed Church 34, the Baptist Church (and Hungarian Baptist Aid) 32, the Lutheran Church eight, and other religious groups 10. At year's end, churches operated 850 of the country's 10,233 public education institutions (approximately 8 percent).

However, this arrangement requires designated religious group to be able to collect the signatures of at least 50 percent of the parents and adult students (US Department of State, 2012). With Muslims being a very small minority, it seems to be a problem and there are no full-time public schools run by Muslim organizations according to our knowledge.

From an interview with one of the Muslim organization leaders (Timea, 2015) we come to know that most of the Muslims in Hungary, mainly concentrated around Budapest belong to lower income sector of community and mosques/ weekend schools find it difficult to finance their activities based on limited donations. We observed a similar trend related to financial difficulties for Muslim organizations from other sources as well.

Muslims, however, have their representation in the list of approved religious organizations in the country. Parents are also keen to get their children education in Islam. Budapest masjid is reported to teach 200 pupils currently and also offers special vacation courses.

## LATVIA

The Ecclesiastical Council in Latvia comments on religious issues for the government. The council is an advisory body chaired by the prime minister. It includes representatives from major religious groups: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Baptist, Adventist, Old Believers, Methodist, and Jewish. Only traditional organizations are represented on the council, limiting the input of other religious organizations into government decisions on religious matters. By law "traditional" religious groups enjoy certain rights and privileges that "nontraditional" groups do not. Religion-specific laws define relations between the state and each of the traditional religious groups.

#### NON-CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION:

All schools in Latvia are required to offer a choice between a non-confessional course, "Christian Faith," and a course in "Ethics" in grades 1 through 4. They also can offer a non-confessional course, "Christian Ethics," as an alternative to secular "Ethics" in grade 7 and an elective course, "History of Religions," in high school. However, students are not required to study religion in any grade, provided they study ethics in elementary school and grade 7 (Filipsone, 2005).

#### TEACHER TRAINING:

Teachers can acquire certification to teach religion and ethics at the Professional Program of Teachers of Religion and Ethics at the Faculty of Theology, University of Latvia. However, teachers of the course "Christian Faith" still have to be approved by their churches. (Filipsone, 2005).

#### ISSUES RELATED TO CONFESSIONISM:

Despite non-confessional education in the constitution, confessionalism is still strong in Latvia, with mainline churches seeking to consolidate their identities after 50 years of forced atheism under communist rule.

#### VARIATIONS:

Even though there has been certain progress in the field of religious education due to increased governmental support, in reality, the existence and form of religious education in a public school are still highly dependent on the attitude of its administration. It is still possible for principals to influence the decision of parents of elementary school students in favor of ethics, as well as to choose to offer the electives, "Christian Ethics" and "History of Religions." This situation allows for a wide range of experience with religious education in different schools: in some of them religious education flourishes, in some it barely exists, and in others it is completely ignored.

#### ARRANGEMENTS IF STUDENTS PREFER CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION:

The law stipulates that only representatives of traditional Christian churches (i.e., Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, Orthodox Christian, Old Believer, Baptist, Methodist, and Adventist) and Jewish groups may teach religion in public schools to public school students who volunteer to take the classes. The government provides funds for this education. Students at state-supported national minority schools also may receive education on a voluntary basis on the religion "characteristic of the national minority." Other denominations and religious groups that do not have their own state-supported minority schools may provide religious education only in private schools. Depending on the grade level, courses can range from sectarian instruction with Church-approved instructors to nondenominational Christian teachings to overviews of major world religions. Parents can register their children for nonreligious ethics classes instead of Christian-based courses.

#### MUSLIM COMMUNITY:

The Muslim community in Latvia, a small minority, maintains a low profile to avoid xenophobia against them (Poljarevic, 2009).

“Despite the not so favorable setting in Latvia, the Muslim community is continuing to expand. Currently, the estimated numbers of Muslims in the country range from five to ten thousand. Seven existing Muslim congregations (five in the capital and two in other smaller cities) are united under the Latvian Muslim Organizations Association. In the recent years, Muslims have been working on obtaining the permission to build the first purpose-built mosque in Latvia. The translation of the Quran from Arabic into Latvian also is on the way. Looking at the general scene of Islam in today’s Latvia, I am happy to see young, eager minds, who are ready to prove to the quite prejudiced locals that Islam is also for Latvians.”(Brence, 2012)

Like other European countries, we find small but very active Ahmaddiya community in Latvia as well which is pursuing to convert the Muslim and non-Muslim population to their religion through ventures such as translating Quran in Latvian (Poljarevic, 2009). Orthodox Muslim scholars have highlighted errors and deceptions in Ahmadi translations (Al-Munajjid, 2007; Kidwai, 2000).

#### LITHUANIA

In Lithuania, the education is mostly public (taxpayer-funded) with private or religious facilities being an exception.

#### MUSLIM POPULATION:

There were almost 3000 Muslims in Lithuania during the 2001 census, or some 0.1% of the population (*Sunni Islam in Lithuania*, 2012).

#### LEGAL PROVISIONS:

We come to know about relevant legislation related to religious education through UNESCO (UNESCO, 1992):

- Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion shall not be restricted.
- Every person shall have the right to freely choose any religion or faith and, either individually or with others, in public or in private, to manifest his or her religion or faith in worship, observance, practice or teaching.
- Parents and legal guardians shall have the liberty to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.
- A person may not have his rights restricted in any way, or be granted any privileges, on the basis of his or her sex, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, religion, convictions, or opinions.
- State and local government establishments of teaching and education shall be secular. At the request of parents, they shall offer classes in religious instruction
- The State shall recognize traditional Lithuanian churches and religious organizations, as well as other churches and religious organizations provided that they have a basis in society and their teaching and rituals, do not contradict morality or the law.

- Churches and religious organizations shall freely proclaim the teaching of their faith, perform the rituals of their belief, and have houses of prayer, charity institutions, and educational institutions for the training of priests of their faith.

From relevant constitutional points mentioned above, it is clear that religious education would only be provided if it is requested and recognized religious organizations can take part. Sunni Islam is one of the state-recognized 9 traditional religions which have a presence in the country for more than 300 years. Accordingly, Muslim community can provide religious education in schools, if requested by parents.

#### ALTERNATE TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The optional lessons of ethics are provided for those pupils who refuse attending lessons of religion. The optional program of religion or ethics for all Lithuanian schools was confirmed by the Ministry of Education and the Church institutions in 1994. According to the latest amendment of the Law on Education (2003, June 28), the students choose between ethics and religion. Under the age of 14, the parents have the right to choose for their schoolchildren under 14. Nearly half of Lithuanian school students choose religion as an optional subject.

#### ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

Muslims in Lithuania are a very small minority and though the provision for education on the religion of choice is there, adequate information or research about the current status of Islamic education in schools could not be found.

#### FUNDING:

“The number of wholly private religious schools is relatively small. There are 30 schools with ties to Catholic or Jewish groups, although students of different religious groups often attend these schools. All accredited private schools (religious and nonreligious) receive funding from the Ministry of Education and Science through a voucher system based on the number of pupils. This system covers only the program costs of school operation. Founders generally bear responsibility for covering capital outlays; however, the ministry funds capital costs of traditional religious private schools where there is an international agreement to do so. To date, the Catholic Church is the only religious group with such an international agreement “.

#### ICELAND

Following information is found out through 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT (US Department of State, 2013a) and other relevant literature:

In Iceland, Lutheran church serves as the state church and receives many benefits which other religious organizations do not have though other officially recognized religious organizations also receive some government funding.

#### ALMOST ENTIRELY PUBLIC SCHOOLING:

In Iceland, almost all schools are public schools.

#### INSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

School grades 1-10 (ages 6-15) are required by law to include instruction in Christianity, ethics, and theology. The law also mandates that general teaching practices be shaped by “the Christian heritage of Icelandic culture, equality, responsibility, concern, tolerance, and respect for human value.” The compulsory curriculum for Christianity, ethics, and theology encourages an ‘overview’ of other beliefs as well.

However, according to (Gunnarsson, 2006), 16 years of cases review suggest direct indoctrination.

In secondary schools, theology continues to be taught under the rubric of “community studies” along with sociology, philosophy, and history.

#### EXEMPTION FROM RELIGIOUS STUDY

The law provides the minister of education with the authority to exempt pupils from instruction in compulsory subjects such as Christianity, ethics, and theology. In practice, individual school authorities issue exemptions informally.

#### ALTERNATE TO RE:

There is no obligation for school authorities to offer other religious or secular instruction in place of these classes. Some observers have noted that this discourages students or their parents from requesting such exemptions and may isolate students who seek exemptions or put them at risk of bullying in schools.

#### REQUIREMENTS RELATED TO RE:

According to rules, if students have to attend a religious gathering, it would be under the supervision of a teacher and without an active involvement from students.

#### CONTROVERSIES REGARDING INDOCTRINATION IN SCHOOLS:

However, the towns of Alftanes and Mosfellsbaer, in cooperation with the state church, continued to run a pastoral care program for students under which a pastor comes to the classroom and provides guidance on a variety of subjects. The Ethical Humanist Association, Siðmennt, and representatives of non-state religious organizations continued their public criticism of the program’s use in public schools, claiming that the pastoral care program contained aspects of religious indoctrination.

According to Siðmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association (Knútsson, 2011):

“State church priests and deacons, with some exceptions and varying intensity, come into public nursery and primary school classrooms and indoctrinate children. It is often done without parental knowledge or permission or under the pretense that it is not indoctrination. School children are taken to churches and participate in religious rituals. Children in some classrooms participate in public prayers. The representatives of the Gideon Association come into classrooms and distribute bibles to all children, whether they are Christian or not and in some instances conduct public prayers. Children often participate in religious plays. All of these activities are defined by international human rights organizations as religious indoctrination”.

#### STATE FUNDING:

All state schools are fully funded. In the very small number of private schools, students only pay enrollment fees. Housing and teacher salaries are provided by the state (Arnett, 2007, p. 435).

#### ISLAMIC SCHOOLS:

There is no known Islamic school in Iceland, however, there are two Islamic organizations which are involved in informal education.

#### MALTA:

In the scholastic year 2008-2009, 11.9% of the student population attended independent schools, compared to 61.4% at state schools and 26.7% at church schools (Cutajar, 2010). Government contributes 15% of private schooling cost. The muslim population in Malta was estimated to be only 6000 in 2013 ("Maltese perceptions of Muslims," 2013). Catholic education is a part and parcel of public schools, however, those who do not want to attend it, can skip (Gatt, 2006; J. Nielsen, Akgönül, Alibašić, & Racijs, 2014b). There are two known full-time Islamic schools in Malta. One of them teaches Maltese curriculum with added Islamic studies courses. This school receives some government funding. Number of students in this school are on the increase (Ameen, 2013; James, 2013). The other school, commonly referred to as 'Arabic school' receives no governments funding, unlike catholic schools, despite excellent administrative records (EPASI, 2008). This school teaches Libyan curriculum.

#### CONCLUSION:

In this paper we have reviewed the status of European countries with the significant Muslim population in terms of their educational policies and place of Islamic Education in public and private schooling sector. Presented facts highlight the importance and urgency of effective leadership development to benefit not only the educational sector but all facets of our lives.

I end with this beautiful verse from Quran:

"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."  
(Surah Ar-Rad)

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## DOWRY – HOW LONG THE POOR HAVE TO SUFFER

Ishfaq Parwaz

### ABSTRACT:

The paper discusses evil aspects related to the contemporary practice of 'dowry' which fuels a very large number of harassment, violence and humiliation cases every month. This system subjugates women and puts them in lower societal positions. On the other hand, Islam emphasizes this as a responsibility for men to take care of their wives and give them their due share in the form of *Mahr*. The article highlights consequences of the prevalent dowry system and reasons why it should be condemned.

### INTRODUCTION:

Our society is suffering from many social evils at the moment. The dowry system<sup>1</sup> is prevalent virtually in all parts of our society<sup>2</sup>. Parents pay huge sums of money so that their daughters may secure a satisfactory and permanent post. Unfortunately, the whole affair has assumed the proportions of scandal as the groom's parents try to extract the maximum from a matrimonial alliance. They insist on receiving a huge amount of cash, luxury items like refrigerators, scooters, cars and in certain cases even houses.

### EVIL ASPECTS OF DOWRY SYSTEM:

Cases of harassment of young brides and bride burning on account of inadequate dowry have multiplied during the recent years<sup>3</sup>. In modern times, dowry has become a contemptible social evil. It reduces the sacred institution of marriage to a business transaction. It degrades a young maiden to the level of a saleable commodity. Poor people have to incur heavy debts to provide their daughter with a handsome dowry. This wrecks them financially. Some people resort to unfair means to meet dowry demands, an approach that poses a grave threat to the moral values of the society. The daughters of poor parents consider themselves a burden on their family and they either opt for a life of disgraceful spinsterhood or commit suicide. The dowry system is also an evil on the grounds that it perpetuates the myth of male superiority. If a bride is harassed for more dowries, it may breed hatred in her mind for her husband and ruin the married life of the couple. The dowry system has ruined the lives of many brilliant girls because their parents could not afford to give sufficient dowry

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to understand that the word 'Dowry' mentioned in this article refers to: "money or property that a wife or wife's family gives to her husband when the wife and husband marry in some cultures", as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary ("Dowry," 2015). This is considered by many scholars to have stemmed from Hindu culture (Abdullah, 2008; Dawn News, 2010; Dr. Israr Ahmed, n.d.). Islamic concept of Dowry (*Mahr*) is opposite and is from husband to wife. In this context, "dowry refers to a payment from the husband to the wife that is legally due by Islamic Law at the solemnisation ceremony (*akad nikah*), either in the form of money actually paid or recognized as a credit with or without security, or as something that, according to Islamic law, has monetary value" (*ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW (FEDERAL TERRITORY) ACT 1984*, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> "Dowries have a long history in Europe, South Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world". ("Dowry | Marriage Custom," 2015)

<sup>3</sup> (India Times, 2015; Kleinman, 2014; Rowlett, 2014; "Woman ends life over alleged dowry harassment," 2015; 2009 محمد يوسف)

to satisfy their in-laws. Sometimes the girls commit suicide when their in-laws persecute them to bring more and more money from their parents. Sometimes the greedy husbands along with their parents also kill their wives, when they are not given huge dowry. This accounts for the spurt in cases of bride-burning and violence on women.

#### PREVALENT SOCIAL NORMS:

Among the patriarchal social customs prevalent in our society, the widespread practice of *Jahez* (dowry) affects both rural and urban women. The amount of dowry a woman brings to her in-laws at the time of marriage varies depending on her family wealth, but certain material expectations such as furnishing the in-laws house and gifting of gold jewellery and embellished clothing to the extended family of the husband tend to be the minimum standard for many families.

#### IMPLICATIONS:

The potential implications of promoting dowry are evident in the society where the birth of a girl is marked by a cry of sorrow<sup>4</sup>. Yet, it is often the sensitive nature of the wedding process that prevents the bride's family from questioning the burden of dowry amidst blatantly expressed expectations of material gains in coercive circumstances.

I had an opportunity to interview some female survivors of acid attacks and stove burning in my surroundings (Kashmir). My study on possible factors perpetuating such ruthless acts of gender-based violence revealed that for many of these women, their insufficient dowry exposed them to dowry related violence and harassment. Today in the wake of Oscar-winning "saving face"<sup>5</sup>, the issue of gender-based violence, specifically acid attacks has received global attention. Unfortunately, as the consumerist culture continues to escalate in our contemporary society, the practice of dowry as well as the incidence of dowry-related violence is on the rise.

#### ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE:

According to Islamic scholars, the practice of dowry (from bride's family to bridegroom or his family) is not endorsed by Islam<sup>6 7</sup> and gifts to the bride are only to be given voluntarily (Mahmud, 2010). From the marriage of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ's four daughters, there is no record of him having given anything to his daughters except for Fatima to whom he gave simple household items (Aleem, 2011, p. 149) when she married Ali (R.A).

#### CONCLUSION:

<sup>4</sup> (Dawn News, 2010)

<sup>5</sup> (Dawn News, 2013)

<sup>6</sup> (Dhorat, 2001; Dr. Israr Ahmed, n.d.; Mahmud, 2010; Nomani, 2015; 2009 محمد يوسف)

<sup>7</sup> Islam on other hand makes it mandatory for men to take care of their wives and give them *dowry*, called *Mahr* which symbolizes their duty towards women (al-Mahmudi, 2012; Sheikh Muhammed Salih Al-Munajjid, 2015). Even in case of men, it is instructed to avoid burdening the men and keep it bearable and reasonable (Al-Munajjid, 2015). Some scholars also argue that: "The dowry is not included among the essential 'pillars' of marriage (rukun) or prerequisites for the validity of a marriage. If the couple agrees to marry without determining the amount of the dowry, the marriage is still valid but the husband is required to pay a commensurate dowry (mahar misil) which entitles the wife to a dowry that befits her social status" (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2012).

Considering the points highlighted in this paper and the fact that Islam promotes minimal expenditures on wedding with the only obligatory condition being *Nikah* (Dhorat, 2001; Dr. Israr Ahmed, n.d.) (Marriage contract), there is a greater need for a concerted effort to condemn the practice of dowry in our society. Dowry is not only a curse, it is a bane -something that scars a woman's self-respect and pushes her towards an ignominious end.

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**O YE PEOPLE! – COLLECTION OF VERSES FROM QURAN DIRECTLY ADDRESSING MANKIND**

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**ABSTRACT:**

According to our study, there are 25 places where humanity has been directly addressed in Quran and reminded about some of the most important messages that they need to remember for their salvation. Some of these lessons we learn from current study are summarized below:

Allah SWT addresses mankind about the truth he sent down - a conclusive proof and a clear light. It is a clear instruction from Rabb ul Aalameen, a cure for whatever (disease) is in the hearts, and guidance and grace unto all who believe. Whoever chooses to follow the true guidance does so for his own good; and whoever chooses to go astray, does so at his own peril. The Messenger has come to you with this truth from your Lord and they give clear warnings so believe; it is better for you. And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O YOU [PEOPLE] of understanding, that you may become righteous. But if you disbelieve - then indeed, to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth. And ever is Allah Knowing and Wise. You are they who stand in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy. If He wills, He can do away with you, O PEOPLE, and bring others [in your place]. And ever is Allah competent to do that. Messengers and those who preach this noble message are there to convey only and are not responsible for the conduct of people they convey the message to. When the noble among us come to us and relate to us verses from the noble book, then whoever fears Allah and reforms - there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve. We may neglect the message and messengers in this world but on the day of judgement, there will be no excuses and all what we do would be clearly in front of us. That would be the day when assembly of Jinns and Men will say, "We bear witness against ourselves". They will shamefully accept that they were deluded by the worldly life. Assuredly Allah's promise is true. So let not the life of the world delude you, and let not the Deluder delude you concerning Allah. Fear your Lord, for the convulsion of the hour (of judgement), will be a thing terrible! Fear your Lord and fear a Day when no father will avail his son, nor will a son avail his father at all. Indeed, the promise of Allah is the truth, so let not the worldly life delude you and be not deceived about Allah by the Deceiver.

Worship your Lord (Allah), Who created you and those who were before you so that you may become God-fearing. This was the message of all prophets who remind mankind about their Lord to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. There is no deity except Him; He gives life and causes death. He has no partner and it only He who has power over everything. Those among mankind who invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued. Is there any creator other than Allah who provides for you from the heaven and earth? There is no deity except Him, so how are you deluded?

Allah has given us means to live our lives with all the resources He has surrounded us with. We can eat of that which is lawful and good on the earth and cover ourselves and beautify with the clothing

he has bestowed us. But while living this life and enjoying the bounties of the most Merciful, we have to ensure that we live our lives according to what our Creator and Sustainer wants us to live like. We should not follow the footsteps of Shaytan who is verily, our open enemy. We are all created from one man and women. Our nations, colors and other affiliations do not make some of us better than the others. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

With each passing moment, we are all moving towards our final destiny. All of us have to die one day and then be resurrected to taste what we do in this world. Allah SWT created us from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then from a clinging clot, and then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed. He settles in the wombs whom He wills for a specified term, then He brings us out as a child, and then develops us that we may reach our time of maturity. And among us are some who die early. And among us are some who return to the most decrepit age. Allah has control over all this. We emerge from a humble beginning – clot, and reach a humble end where we are dependent on others for our needs feel much pain before eventually dying. All what we accumulate stays in this world and we go empty handed. Why should we not try to earn something for the here-after?

We see Allah sends down rain upon the barren land, it quivers and swells and grows things of every beautiful kind. We accordingly pray to our Lord to shower the rain of His blessings and love on our barren hearts and turn them alive again.

Everything has been very clearly laid in front of us.

O YE PEOPLE! What has deceived you concerning your Gracious Lord!!!!

## INTRODUCTION:

There is no doubt in the holy Quran as it claims “laa raiba fehe” (02:02). It clearly lays in front of its reader what is right and what is not in a very clear manner. Allah SWT not only sent the book but also the greatest of teachers to explain it in the best possible manner. We have now with us these two great sources of guidance which invite us to ponder and think.

There are a number of verses in Quran which directly call all mankind and remind them of their obligations to their Lord and His creations. This study accumulates all those verses along with simple extract of teachings for each verse. To understand the verses further and in greater depth, readers should refer to authentic commentaries and explanations of Quran. It should also be remembered that these are not the only verses which contain the words ‘O Ye people’ and it does not mean that these are the only verses that humanity in general has to follow. All of Quran and all of the teachings of our beloved master Muhammad ﷺ are sources of salvation for all of humanity. It is reported from Messenger of Allah ﷺ: “Every Prophet used to be sent to his nation only but I have been sent to all mankind” (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 7, Number 331). It is in our own benefit to dive deep into Quran and Sunnah and try to understand them in an unbiased and rational manner for our own benefit. I strongly recommend going through complete Quran with authentic commentary to get a broader idea of its message and the light it brings along. In the present age, we, unfortunately, see a lot of ill-intentioned people who misquote or half-quote Quranic verses to cast doubt and confusion. The only way to tackle such deception is to study our Islam from its very sources,

understand clear context and background of relevant verses and prophetic traditions and seek assistance from who have been blessed with right knowledge and guidance.

A brief explanation is provided with each verse.

## VERSES: O YE PEOPLE!

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

### 1) ADORE YOUR GUARDIAN-LORD

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ {البقرة/21}

O YE PEOPLE! Worship your Lord (Allah), Who created you and those who were before you so that you may become God-fearing.

#### Brief Explanation:

*In first 20 verses of Surah Baqarah, Allah SWT explains three groups of people: those who believe, those who do not believe and hypocrites. In this verse (and verse 22), Allah SWT calls all three groups together and invites them to the key message of Quran i.e. to leave worshipping created beings or not believing in divinity.*

*In starting the address, verse 21 uses the Arabic word 'An-nas', which signifies mankind in general, or man as such - so, the word covers all the three groups we have just mentioned. And the message delivered by the verse is: "Worship your Lord." The Arabic word 'Ibadah' (worship) connotes expending all energies one has in total obedience to somebody, and shunning all disobedience out of one's awe and reverence. Word Rabb refers to the one who gives nurture. Let us add that the choice of this particular name from among the Beautiful names of Allah is very meaningful in the present context, for the affirmation has thus been combined with the argument in a very short sentence. The word Rabb indicates that only He is, or can be, worthy of being worshipped, He is the final and absolute Cause of nurturing man - Who changes man through gradual stages of development from a drop of water into healthy, sentient and rational being, and Who provides the means for his sustenance and growth. This truth is so obvious that even an ignorant or intellectually dull man would, on a little reflection, not fail to see and admit that such a power of nurturing can belong only to Allah, and not to a created being. What can a creature do for man, when it owes its very existence to the Creator? Can a needy one come to the help of another? And if it appears to be doing so, the act of nurturing must in reality and ultimately belong to the One Being on whom both have to depend in order to exist at all. So, who else but the Rabb can be worthy of adoration and worship?*

*The sentence is addressed to all the three groups of men, and for each it has a different meaning. "Worship your Lord": the phrase calls upon the disbelievers to give up worshipping created beings and to turn to the Creator; it asks the hypocrites to be sincere and true in their faith; it commands the sinning Muslims to change their ways and try to be perfect in their obedience to Allah; and it encourages the God-fearing Muslims to be steadfast in their worship and obedience, and to make a greater effort in the way of Allah.*

*The two verses proceed to enlarge upon the theme by specifying certain special qualities of the Rabb: "Who created you and those before you". This is a quality which one cannot even imagine to belong to a created being, for it can pertain only to the Creator - that is, the quality of giving existence to what did not exist before, and of producing from the darkness and filth of the mother's womb a creature as lovely and noble as man.*

*In adding to the phrase: "who created you" the words, "and those before you", the verse shows that Allah alone is the Creator of all mankind. It is also significant that the verse mentions only "those before you" and not "those who will come after you", and through this omission suggests that there will not be any Ummah (a traditional community formed by all the followers of a prophet) to succeed the Ummah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, for no prophet will be sent down after the Last Prophet ﷺ, and hence no new 'Ummah' will arise.*

*The final phrase of verse 21 means: "so that you may become God-fearing". It may also be translated to mean "So that you may save yourselves from hell", or "So that you may guard yourselves against evil." But the point is that one can hope to attain salvation and paradise only when one worships Allah alone, and does not associate anyone else with Him.*

*Before we proceed, we must clarify a very important doctrinal point. The phrase "so that you may become God-fearing" employs the Arabic particle Valla which indicates an expectation or hope, and is used on an occasion when it is not definite that a certain action or event would necessarily be actualized. Now, if one does really possess 'Iman (faith) and does really believe in Tauhid, one would, in consequence definitely attain salvation and go to Heaven, as Allah Himself has promised. But here the certainty has been expressed in terms of an expectation or hope in order to make man realize that no human action by itself and in itself can bring salvation as a necessary reward. One can attain salvation and go to Heaven only by the grace of Allah alone. The ability to perform good deeds, and 'Iman itself is only a sign of divine grace, not the cause.*

*The next verse recounts some other qualities of Allah with regard to the act of nurturing, with the difference that while verse 21 spoke of the bounties of Allah pertaining to the human self, verse 22 speaks of those pertaining to man's physical environment.*

## 2) EAT OF WHAT IS LAWFUL & GOOD

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ {البقرة/168}

O YE PEOPLE! Eat of that which is lawful and good on the earth, and follow not the footsteps of Shaytan (Satan or The Evil One). Verily, he is to you an open enemy.

### Brief Explanation<sup>ii</sup>:

*In this verse is an invitation to all mankind to enjoy the good things in life and avoid the harmful ones. This is coupled with a warning against following the suggestions of Satan, who will only advise people to do evil and harmful things and to arrogate to themselves the right to decide what is right and what is not without reference to the Creator. There is also a warning against following others blindly in matters of religion and living one's life, and a denunciation of the worship of any deity other than God Almighty.*

*Avoiding something permissible on the assumption that doing so will please Allah is a Satanic thought. These instructions show plainly how realistic and practical Islam is, and how genuinely aware of man's nature and needs. The rule is that everything is lawful with the exception of a few things, which are listed in the Quran and Hadith by name.*

*The surah derides the argument put forward by the Arab idolaters or the Jews, or both, who insist that they will only follow what their forefathers followed: "Even if their forefathers did not use reason at all, and followed no guidance." That is exactly what the Quran condemns. When it comes to defining matters relating to faith, the Quran rejects all authority other than God's, and flatly condemns those who follow blindly inherited traditions and practices. The next verse gives a humiliating image of those blind followers of earlier generations, depicting them as herds of sheep that can hear the shouting and the sounds made by their shepherds but do not understand what those words actually mean. In fact, as the Surah goes on we realize that they are worse.*

*Meaning of words:*

*The real meaning of the root word 'halla' in (halalan tayyiban: permissible and good) is 'to open a knot'. In that sense, what has been made halal means that a knot has been opened and the restriction has been removed. The blessed Companion Sahl ibn 'Abdullah R.A. has said: "Salvation depends on three things - eating halal, fulfilling (divine) obligations and following the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ" The word 'tayyib' means 'good' as inclusive of the clean and the pure and covers the twin aspects of being lawful, permissible or halal and being naturally desirable.*

*The word 'khtuwat' is the plural form of 'khtuwah' which is the distance between the two feet when striding. Here the 'khtuwat' of Shaytan means Satanic deeds.*

*The blessed Companion 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud R.A. said that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said: "The son of Adam is influenced by a suggestion from the Satan and a suggestion from the angel. The Satanic suggestion has the effect of bringing forth the expedient gains in evil deeds and thereby opening the avenues of negating the truth, while the angelic suggestion promises reward and success for good deeds and leaves the happy effect of a heart in peace at its attestation of the truth."*

### 3) FOLLOW THE LAW OF EQUALITY

وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ {البقرة/179}

And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O YOU [PEOPLE] of understanding, that you may become righteous.

Brief Explanation<sup>iii</sup>:

*This verse signifies the importance of just retribution which is considered as a life. It indicates the fact that if right punishment is given (by a legitimate government, not individuals or groups), then it would serve as a deterrent or negative reinforcement for such a crime to happen in future.*

*In the case of killing, it is also permission for both parties to settle on diyat. This situation would arise when the victim's relatives decide to accept financial compensation instead of insisting on the*

execution of the killer in retaliation. Once this is agreed, the victim's relatives are also under an obligation to seek a fair and amicable settlement, while the killer's guardian or representative must, on his part, settle readily and honourably. This serves to clear the air and to remove any ill-feelings or grudges that would have inevitably arisen between the two parties. It would also be conducive to a more friendly and pleasant relationship between the living members of both parties. This provision has been laid down out of God's grace, as a special favour and an act of mercy towards believers.

#### 4) REVERENCE YOUR GUARDIAN-LORD & YOUR MOTHER

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا {النساء/1}

O YE PEOPLE! Fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it, its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer.

##### Brief Explanation<sup>iv</sup>:

This first passage of this Surah An-Nisa begins with this verse which reminds people that they all have one Lord and a single Creator, that they descend from the same origin and belong to one family. It defines the unit of humanity as the individual and makes the family the unit of society. It emphasises the importance of fearing God and fostering ties of kinship in order to build on this basis all the obligations of mutual care and support, as well as compassion within the family and within humanity as a single whole. All the legislation and regulations included in this surah take into account the twin obligations of fearing God and of fostering ties of kinship. In the opening passage starting with verse, the duties and legal provisions concerning orphans are outlined, thus providing protection for those who are normally weak within both the family and society. These provisions define the way in which orphans and their property should be looked after. They also regulate how inheritance takes place within the family and the various shares of different relatives according to a whole range of situations. All this relates to the fundamental principle stated in this opening verse, reminders of which are given at the beginning, middle or end of other verses. The emphasis being on the relationship between these regulations and legal provisions and the One who enacts them, the Supreme Lord.

##### Meaning of Words:

The word, 'al-arham' in this verse is the plural of rahim. Rahim refers to the womb. The womb of the mother is the home of the child until born. Since this womb is the source of blood relationship, the act of maintaining relations in that line is called silatur-rahim in Arabic (literally, umbilical link or bond or relationship). The converse of it, that is, showing carelessness and indifference towards natural linkage based on blood relationship is identified as qat'-al-rahim (literally, umbilical delinkage, meaning cutting off relationship with one's kin).

The noble ahadith have laid great emphasis on bonds of kinship.

The Holy Prophet ﷺ has said: Whoever likes to have his livelihood made plentiful and his age extended for him should maintain good relations with his near of kin. (Mishkat, p. 419)

*This hadith tells us about two benefits that issue forth from treating near relations well. The merit of the Hereafter vouchsafed, this fair treatment of one's kin has its benefits in this life as well, that is, it removes straightening's from his livelihood and blesses his age with more good years.*

*Sayyidna 'Abdullah ibn Salam R.A. says: When the Holy Prophet ﷺ came to Madinah al-Tayyibah and I presented myself before him, the very first words from him which fell into my ears were:*

*O men, make a practice of greeting each other with salam, and feed people (for the pleasure of Allah), and treat near relations well, and pray by night while people sleep - you will enter Paradise in peace. (Mishkat, p. 108)*

*There is another narration on the same subject in which the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been reported to have said: Charity to the needy is just charity, while to a near relative it becomes twofold: charity and kinship. (Mishkat, p. 171)*

*Hence, a simple change in the end-use of charity yields two types of merits.*

*As opposed to this there is the attitude of cold-shouldering or severing of blood relationships. How stern are the warnings given in hadith reports against this can be imagined from the following two ahadith:*

*The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: 1. A breaker of (blood) relationships shall not enter Paradise. (Mishkat, p. 419)*

*2. Mercy shall not descend upon a people among whom there is a breaker of (blood) relationships. (Mishkat, p. 420)*

*The statement in the last sentence of this verse: (and surely, Allah is watchful over you) motivates human hearts to fulfil rights as and when they are due because Divine watchfulness implies awareness of whatever there is in human hearts - intentions, scruples, motives - everything. Doing things half-heartedly, formally, or for fear of possible embarrassment, without any genuine desire to serve, shall remain acts unacceptable to Allah. Incidentally, from here we find out why Allah should be feared - because He is watchful over everyone, always. As pointed out elsewhere too, this is typical of the usual style of the Holy Quran when it does not introduce laws in sheer cold print like the laws of the governments of this world, but puts them forth in the manner of education, training and affection by not restricting itself to the word of law alone, but by combining it with the grooming of minds and hearts as well.*

## 5) GOD COULD DESTROY YOU AND CREATE ANOTHER RACE

إِنْ يَشَأْ يُذْهِبْكُمْ أَتُهَا النَّاسُ وَيَأْتِ بِآخَرِينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى ذَلِكَ قَدِيرًا {النساء/133}

If He wills, He can do away with you, O PEOPLE, and bring others [in your place]. And ever is Allah competent to do that.

Brief Explanation:

*It is a message for those who think that they are irreplaceable and if they do not do anything nothing can be done for the deen of Allah. If Allah wishes, He can replace those who turn away with other people who would love Allah SWT, His messenger and the noble religion of Islam and Allah SWT will love them.*

*In Surah Muhammad ﷺ, Allah SWT says: “And if you turn away, He will replace you with another people; then they will not be the likes of you” (Verse 38).*

*Similarly, in Surah Al-Maidah, verse 53, it is mentioned: “O you who believe! Whoever from among you turns back from his religion (Islam), Allah will bring a people whom He will love and they will love Him”. So the effort for the deen of Allah will continue to be made. If we choose to do it, it will be for our own sake and our own benefit in the hereafter.*

## 6) BELIEVE IN APOSTLE: IT IS BEST FOR YOU

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ الرَّسُولُ بِالْحَقِّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَأَمِنُوا خَيْرًا لَكُمْ وَإِنْ تَكْفُرُوا فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا {النساء/170}

O YE PEOPLE! the Messenger has come to you with the truth from your Lord, so believe; it is better for you. But if you disbelieve - then indeed, to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth. And ever is Allah Knowing and Wise.

### Brief Explanation<sup>v</sup>:

*This is a universal call to all mankind, to tell them that God’s Messenger ﷺ has come to them with the truth from their Lord. He who believes in him follows the right path. Those who deny him should know that God has no need for any of them and He can overpower them all. By believing, no-one is benefitting Allah in any way, but their own selves. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. He is aware of everything, and He runs all affairs according to His knowledge and wisdom.*

*This call to all mankind to believe in the last message was preceded by a recital of all the false claims made by people to whom revelations were given at earlier times. This together with the unmasking of the true nature of the Jews and their evil deeds throughout their history. Their inherent obstinacy, even in their attitude towards Moses, their Prophet, leader and saviour, is also exposed. The call is also preceded by an explanation of the nature of this last message and its purpose, both of which require that God sends messengers and sends Muhammad ﷺ to all mankind. Having sent a number of messengers with messages to their own nations, it is only logical that this process should culminate with a final, universal message to all mankind “so that people may have no argument against God, once the messengers had come”. Had this final message not been addressed to all mankind, later generations would have had an argument against God. But the final and universal message of Muhammad ﷺ has stopped any such argument. To deny that a message should come after the Jewish prophets, including or excluding Jesus (peace be upon him), is contrary to God’s justice which ensures that no punishment can be exacted without having first sent a message. As it happened, there was no universal message prior to Islam. Such a universal message was, therefore, inevitable, to ensure God’s justice and mercy to mankind. This proves God’s description of His*

Messenger: "We have only sent you as mercy to mankind." (21: 107) He is, indeed, a manifestation of God's mercy in this life and in the life to come, as appears clearly from this Quranic statement.

## 7) A CONVINCING PROOF HATH COME TO YOU

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بُرْهَانٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ نُورًا مُّبِينًا {النساء/174}

O YE PEOPLE! There has come to you a conclusive proof from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a clear light.

### Brief Explanation<sup>vi</sup>:

*This ayah tells people that this final message brings its own proof from God and that it is a glorious light which removes all doubt. Those who accept its guidance will receive God's mercy and His grace. They will find themselves guided by this light along a straight path.*

*The Divine mark is apparent in the Quran which distinguishes it from what human beings say or write in both construction and message. This is so clear that it is sometimes acknowledged, quite remarkably, by people who do not understand Arabic at all.*

*As for those who know this language and understand its style and can appreciate its finer expressions and methods of construction, theirs was a special case when they were presented with the Quran by Muhammad ﷺ, God's Messenger. We know the famous story of al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq, Abū Sufyān and Abū Jahl, three of the fiercest opponents of Islam, when they sought to listen to the Quran secretly under the cover of darkness. They came only to listen to the Quran, when the Quraysh tribe had decided not to listen to anything the Prophet said. Nevertheless, these Quraysh leaders came out individually, none knowing anything about what the other two were doing, and none realising that he had companions doing the same thing as he. They sat there, outside the place where the Prophet and his few followers were reading the Quran, to listen to it. At dawn, they went back, hoping to arrive home before anyone could see them. But they met on the road and each then blamed the others. They pledged to one another that they would never do it again. However, all three did the same thing for three consecutive nights, before they made a solemn pledge never to repeat their deed. This is only one among many similar stories. People who appreciate fine style can understand the unique nature of the Quran and its captivating effect on people and the clear proof it provides of the truthfulness of its message.*

*We cannot speak in detail here on the subject matter of the Quran, the concept of life it presents, its approach to human life and the system it lays down. In each of these, we have a clear proof of its origin and that it can never be the word of man. It carries the mark of its author, God, the Glorious.*

*Quran is a light which lays bare the very nature of things, and defines the parting of the ways of truth and falsehood within man himself and in human life altogether. When it is properly appreciated, this light gives man the ability to see himself and everything around him clearly, without anything covering its nature or presenting itself in a false light or position. Everything then becomes clear and simple so that man wonders how he could not see it so clearly and simply before he was able to benefit by the light of the Quran. When man allows his soul to be guided by the Quran and receives from it its values and standards, he feels that he has acquired a new element, one which allows him*

*to see all matters with perfect ease and clarity. Many things that used to worry him now fall into place, all appearing as part of a general system, which is simple, natural and clear. We can dwell at great length on this expression: "and We have sent down to you a glorious light". But whatever we say, we will never be able to describe its message in our own words and we cannot impart its significance to anyone who has not experienced it. Such concepts can only be appreciated by personal experience.*

*We accordingly encourage all readers to begin their own journey to understand this noble book and use it as a compass to guide their lives.*

## 8) THE LIFE OF THIS WORLD IS DECEIVING YOU

يَا مَعْشَرَ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسِ أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنْكُمْ يَقُصُّونَ عَلَيْكُمُ آيَاتِي وَيُنذِرُونَكُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا قَالُوا شَهِدْنَا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِنَا وَغَرَّتْهُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَشَهِدُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا كَافِرِينَ {الأنعام/130}

O YE ASSEMBLY OF JINNS & MEN! Did there not come to you messengers from among you, relating to you My verses and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?" They will say, "We bear witness against ourselves"; and the worldly life had deluded them, and they will bear witness against themselves that they were disbelievers.

### Brief explanation<sup>vii</sup>:

*The previous passage of the Surah contained a full discussion of the situation of those whose hearts God opens up to receive the message of surrender to Him. They remain conscious of God and continue to watch Him in all their actions, move towards a life of peace, assured that they will have the patronage of their Lord. As it is customary in the Quran for contrasting scenes of the Day of Judgement to be portrayed, we now have a sketch showing the lot of the evil ones among humans and jinn. These spend their lives inspiring one another with deceptive falsehood, supporting one another in their hostility to every prophet and messenger pointing out to each other what arguments to use with the believers in order to raise doubts in their minds about what God has made lawful and what He has forbidden. All this is portrayed in a very vivid sketch, characterized by dialogue, confession and reproach.*

*Full of life, the scene is shown first to be one of the future, when all creation will be gathered before God. Yet it soon becomes a scene of the present, held in front of the eyes of every listener. This is achieved by the omission of one Arabic word which means in English, "He will say", included in the translation between brackets for clarity. The omission of this phrase, expressed in a single Arabic word, brings the whole scene right into the present so as not to speak of something to be awaited in future but of something that is taking place now. This method is characteristic of the inimitable style of the Quran. The question here is not meant to seek information but to provide it and record the facts as they took place. God who is infinite in His Glory knows what their situation in this life was. Their answer to this question is simply an acknowledgement on their part that they deserve the punishment of the hereafter. This question is addressed to the jinn as well as humans. Does this mean that God has sent messengers to the jinn from among themselves, in the same way as He sent messengers to human beings? God alone knows the nature of this species of His creation, the jinn, who remain unknown to us human beings. However, the Quranic statement may be interpreted to*

mean that the jinn have been able to listen to the revelations sent down to God's Messenger and to convey it to their people, warning them against continuing in their disbelief.

According to *Tafsir Tanvir al Miqbas Min Tafsir Ibn Abbas*, among the jinn, the nine who came to the Prophet ﷺ and then went back to their people to deliver the message. It is also said that the jinn had a prophet of their own called Joseph, (who recounted) recited commands of Allah to them and warned about the consequences of their wrong-doings.

Those of the jinn and humans who are addressed in this way recognize that the question is not meant to solicit information but to record it and to add an element of reproach for their attitude. Therefore, they make a full confession and state that they deserve the punishment they are bound to receive: "They will reply: 'We bear witness against ourselves'".

The life of this world has beguiled us. It distraction is so much that we get lost in it not realizing the real purpose behind our creation. On the day of judgement when all what we have done would be in front of humans and jinns and they will not have anywhere to escape, they will bear witness against themselves. On the Day of Judgement, they testify against themselves because they realize that denial is of no use. Can there be any situation more miserable than to find oneself in a fix where one cannot say in one's own defence even a word of denial, let alone a word of justification?

Let us reflect for a moment on the remarkable Quranic style which paints future events so that we can visualise them now, as if they were taking place in front of our very eyes. The Quran is revealed so that it is read to people in this life, in their own surroundings. But it portrays the scenes of the life to come as if they are taking place now, while scenes of this life belong to an era which has long since passed. In this way, we forget that the Day of Judgement is still to come. We feel that it is here, now. This is only made possible by the remarkable style of the Quran:

When the scene is complete, the address is made to God's Messenger ﷺ, his followers and to mankind in general. The address includes a comment on the judgement made against evil human beings and jinn and the fact that such a great multitude are condemned to the fire. Their fate is sealed only after they have testified against themselves that they continued to disbelieve despite receiving messengers who related to them God's revelations and warned them against what awaited them of God's punishment if they continued to reject the faith.

Messages and signs are all around us. If we don't take right direction now, we will be left with nothing but regret.

## 9) THE RAIMENT IS TO COVER SHAME & ADORNMENT

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارِي سَوْآتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ {الأعراف/26}

O CHILDREN OF ADAM, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness - that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember.

Brief Explanation<sup>viii</sup>:

*By addressing as 'children of Adam' and hence referring to an important aspect of Adam and Eve's story, the attention of the people was drawn to the evil influence of Satan upon their lives. Under Satan's influence, many people in past begun to see dress merely as a shield of protection against the inclemencies of the weather and as a means of adornment. Many people think of it the same way in present times as well. The basic purpose of dress, however, is to cover the private parts of the body – something which among many has receded into the background. It is astonishing to note that what was applicable at the time of revelation is applicable presently as well. In the era of Jahilliyah, people had no inhibition about the immodest exposure of the private parts of their body in public. To publicly take a bath absolutely naked, to attend to the call of nature on thoroughfares, were the order of the day. To crown it all, in the course of Pilgrimage, they used to circumambulate around the Ka'bah in stark nakedness. Women even surpassed men in immodesty. In their view, the performance of religious rites in complete nudity was an act of religious merit.*

*Immodesty, however, was not an exclusive characteristic of the people of pre-Islamic Arabia. Many nations indulged in it in the past, and many nations continue to indulge in it even now. Hence, the message embodied in these verses is not directed just to the people of Arabia. It is rather directed to all men and women of present age and ages to come. Mankind, which is the progeny of Adam, is warned against this particular aspect of Satanic influence on their lives. Satan tried to trick our father Adam and is continuing with its efforts to trick and deceive his sons and daughters. When men show indifference to God's Guidance and turn away from the Message of the Prophets, they virtually place themselves at the mercy of Satan. For it is Satan who makes them abandon way's that are consistent with true human nature and who leads them to immodesty, in the same way, he did with Adam and Eve. Were man to reflect on this, it would become quite evident that when he is deprived of the guidance of the Prophets, he cannot even appreciate, let alone fulfil, the primary requirements of his true nature.*

Allah SWT says in next verse:

*Children of Adam! Let not Satan deceive you in the manner he deceived your parents out of Paradise, pulling off from them their clothing to reveal to them their shame. He and his host surely see you from whence you do not see them. We have made satans the guardians of those who do not believe.*

*So, we may not realize and see our enemy, Satan, but he is there to deceive us, like our forefathers. It is Satan's loaded tool to infuse immodesty. And if we look around us, testimonials to this effort is evident. Pornography, a multi-trillion dollar industry, is accessible by anyone, anytime and from anywhere. It has become one of the biggest addiction of our time and a seed that leads to many other evils including ruined marriages, zina and other serious acts of shame.*

## 10) FOLLOW THE APOSTLES& MEND YOUR LIVES

{الأعراف/35} يَا بَنِي آدَمَ إِنَّمَا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَقُصُّونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِي فَمَنِ اتَّقَى وَأَصْلَحَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

O CHILDREN OF ADAM, if there come to you messengers from among you relating to you My verses, then whoever fears Allah and reforms - there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.

Brief explanation<sup>ix</sup>:

*Before we were sent to live our present life, a pledge was taken from every human being in the world of spirits. This pledge envisaged that they would, when the prophets of Allah come to them with Divine guidance and injunctions, listen to them in earnest and act accordingly. They were also told that those who abide by the pledge and fulfil what is entails, will have their salvation from sorrows and deserve eternal peace and comfort. And conversely, those who belie prophets or rebel against injunction they bring shall have the eternal punishment of hellfire waiting for them. The verses after this verse deal with how various groups started to behave after coming to this world forgetting the promise they made before coming here. Those who have forgotten their promise or have chosen not to live by it find it about it on the day of judgement when nothing would be able to hide their shame and even their own body parts will testify what they used to do in this world.*

### 11) BELIEVE IN GOD & FOLLOW HIS PROPHET

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ الَّذِي يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ وَاتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ {الأعراف/158}

Say, [O Muhammad], "O MANKIND, indeed I am the Messenger of Allah to you all, [from Him] to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. There is no deity except Him; He gives life and causes death." So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered prophet, who believes in Allah and His words, and follow him that you may be guided.

*Brief Explanation<sup>x</sup>:*

*In these ayah's, Allah SWT is addressing His messenger to let mankind know that the message given to him is for all of humanity and all the people, including those towards whom prophets were sent previously. This is, then, the final, universal message that is not confined to a particular community, area or generation. Earlier messages were limited to a certain community or a certain period of time which extended until the appearance of a new messenger. Every new message incorporated certain modifications of the divine law that took into account human progress. The final message is complete and perfect in essence leaving room for flexibility in the implementation of its details as there is no other prophet to come after the final prophet. It is meant for all mankind, and there will be no subsequent local messages for any particular community or generation. It responds to basic human nature, which means that it is suitable for all mankind. Hence, it was conveyed by the unlettered Prophet whose nature remained pure, refined only by the care he received from God. Hence, the Prophet's pure nature conveyed the naturally pure message, addressing the very nature that is common to all mankind: "Say: 'Mankind, I am indeed Gods Messenger to you all.'"*

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is a Messenger to all mankind from Allah – Lord of all the world who is the Sovereign of the whole universe to which all mankind belong. He is the only God to whom everything in the universe submits. The clearest manifestation of His Godhead and His power is seen in the fact that He alone grants life and causes death. His religion, which His Messenger conveys to mankind, is the one that deserves to be accepted by all humanity because it is the religion that makes people fully aware of the true nature of their Lord. Thus, their submission to Him is an enlightened one, entailing complete obedience to God's Messenger.

*This final address makes some important, though subtle, points which should be outlined. To start with, this address implies an order to believe in God and His Messenger. This is the same implication as the declaration that there is no deity other than God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger. This is certainly the essence of faith. This order is preceded by an outline of God's essential attributes: "It is to Him that sovereignty over the heavens and the earth belongs. There is no deity other than Him. He alone grants life and causes death." Hence, it is an order to believe in God, having learnt His true and essential attributes, and learnt that this message applies to all mankind.*

*It also implies that the unlettered Prophet (peace be upon him) believes in God and His word. While this goes without saying, drawing attention to it here is quite important. Before a person advocates a certain cause, he himself must believe in it and must have its essentials clear in his mind so that he knows the true nature of what he advocates. Hence, the Prophet sent as God's Messenger to all mankind is described as one "who believes in God and His words." (Verse 158) This is exactly what he calls on people to believe.*

*The address also refers to the practical requirements of the faith which the Prophet calls on people to accept. When they have accepted faith, they are required to abide by its law and to follow its teachings. This is stated clearly in God's own words: "And follow him, so that you may be rightly guided." (Verse 158) There is simply no way that people can benefit by the guidance given to them through God's Messenger unless they follow in practice what that Messenger says. It is not sufficient that they should believe in it, unless that belief is endorsed by practice. This is the essence of Islam. This faith of Islam makes its own nature clear at every occasion. It is not simply a set of beliefs that find their way into people's minds and hearts. Nor is it merely a set of rituals that have to be observed. It means the complete adherence in practice to everything that God's Messenger has conveyed to us as part of his message. The Prophet ﷺ has not confined himself to telling people to believe in God and His Messenger, or merely to do the various aspects of worship, but he has also conveyed to them, in word and deed, the correct way to live each and every aspect of our lives.*

*There is no way that people can have full guidance unless they follow the Prophet in all these aspects, which, together, form the religion God has given them. This religion of Islam has no version other than that indicated by the command to believe in God and His Messenger, coupled with this order: "And follow him, so that you may be rightly guided." Had the Islamic faith been merely a matter of beliefs only, it would have been sufficient to say: "Believe, then, in God and His Messenger." But God has followed this by the order to follow the Prophet in everything that he has given us.*

*Significance of word 'Ummi' (Un-lettered) prophet in this verse:*

*Imam Ibn Al Kathir explains the word 'Ummi' with the following explanation:*

*"Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): 'Neither did you (O Muhammad) read any book before it (this Qur'aan), nor did you write any book (whatsoever) with your right hand . . .' i.e., 'you (O Muhammad) lived among your people for a while before you brought this Qur'aan to them, and you never read any book or were able to write anything. Everyone among your people and others knows that you are an unlettered man, who does not read or write.' This is how he was described in the previous Books as Allaah said (interpretation of the meaning): 'Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write whom they find written with them in the Tawraat and the*

*Injeel, - he commands them for al-Ma'roof (i.e., Islamic monotheism and all that Islaam has ordained); and forbids them from al-Munkar (i.e., disbelief, polytheism of all kinds, and all that Islaam has forbidden) . . .' [al-A'raaf 7:157].*

*This also nullifies the doubts spread by orientalist who say that Prophet ﷺ could have referred to previous books to come up with Quran. He could not read or write so he could not have done that. There were very few people in Hijaz at that time who could write.*

*An interesting fact is that, as Quran mentions, the prophecy about Prophet Muhammad being unlettered is still present in bible despite countless modifications in it by its followers over the centuries. It is mentioned in the book of Isaiah chapter 29 verse 12:*

*"And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned." When Archangel Gabrail commanded Muhammad ﷺ by saying Iqra - "Read", he replied, "I am not learned".*

*Al-Mawardi says that "there are three key aspects related to Prophet ﷺ being al-Ummi:*

*(i) his message fulfilled the foretelling of the previous Prophets;*

*(ii) this made him similar to and closer to other Prophets;*

*(iii) this would eliminate all suspicion that he had learned the message he preached from books and writings that he had read."*

*According to Imam al-Qurtubi, all of this is evidence of the miraculous nature and truth of his Prophet-hood. Consider this in our time and the power of this message. Imagine Prophet Muhammad ﷺ telling us about the specific duties of female bees at the time where there were no microscopes and people could never figure out which bee is male and which is female. Imagine a prophet who never left the desert telling people about dynamics of sea waves. Imagine the prophet telling us about the mountains being pegged into earth (i.e. having gone into the earth not just staying on top) without any excavations in his time. From where can all this come. It could only be from God through His pure messenger.*

## **12) IT IS HEALING FOR YOUR HEART, GUIDANCE & A MERCY**

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَشِفَاءٌ لِمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ {يونس/57}

O YE PEOPLE! There has come to you an instruction from your Rabb, a cure for whatever (disease) is in your hearts, and guidance and grace unto all who believe.

*Brief Explanation<sup>xi</sup>:*

*"That He may make what is thrown in by Satan a trial for those in whose hearts is a disease and whose hearts are hardened." [Surah al-Hajj (22) : 53]*

*Disease of the heart is a type of degeneration that occurs in it, causing failure in its perception and desires. So with respect to its perception, it falls into doubts upon doubts until it cannot see the truth*

*or it perceives the truth incorrectly. Its desires are degenerated by its hating the truth which would be of benefit to it, and loving the falsehood that would cause it harm. It also related to lust and desire to commit fornication, which may be considered and as in the case of the verse,*

*“...Lest he in whose heart is a disease be moved with desire.” [Surah at-Ahzab (33) : 32]*

*The sick person is harmed by things that the healthy person is not, so slight heat, cold, exertion or other such things will harm him due to his inability to endure them in his weakened state. Sickness, in general, weakens the one afflicted by making his endurance weak and unable to sustain what he would have been able to sustain in a strong state. So a healthy state is preserved by remaining healthy and is removed by the opposite, and the sickness is made more severe by the presence of conditions similar to those that led to the sickness in the first place and removed by the opposite. Therefore, if a sick person is afflicted by something similar to that which led him to being sick in the first place, then he increases in illness and his endurance becomes weaker, until maybe he dies. But if he is affected by something that will increase his strength and weaken the illness then the opposite will occur.*

*The disease of the heart is a pain that occurs in the heart such as the anger felt towards an opponent who overcomes you, for this hurts the heart.*

*Allah, the Exalted said,*

*“...and heal the breast of a believing people and removes the anger of their hearts...” [Surah Tawbah (9) : 14-15]*

*So the healing for them was by removing the suffering that had occurred in their hearts.*

*Likewise doubt and ignorance cause pain to the heart. The Prophet (Saw) said,*

*“Could they not have asked if they did not know? Indeed the cure for ignorance is to ask”.*

*And the one who has doubt in something he has taken on board, causes harm to his heart until he attains knowledge and certainty. Hence, it is said to a scholar when he answers in a way that clarifies the truth: ‘you have healed me with the answer.’*

*If sickness of hearts doesn’t cure, hearts can become spiritually dead as well. Its life, death, sickness and the cure is of much greater significance than the life, death, sickness and cure of our physical body.*

*From the explanation above, we understand that heart becomes sick when presented with doubts and desires, and the sickness becomes more acute. If wisdom and goodly exhortation occur then these are routes to its correction and cure.*

*The Quran is a cure for that which is within the heart, and for the one who has the sickness of doubt and desire in his heart, for it contains clear proofs that distinguish the truth from falsehood, and remove the sickness of false doubts to leave certain knowledge, correct perception and understanding such that the heart sees things in accordance to their reality. It contains wisdom, goodly exhortations both encouraging good and deterring from evil, and stories which contain*

*lessons that necessarily lead to the correction of the heart by making the heart desire what is good for it and detest what is harmful to it. Hence, the heart is left desiring what will give it guidance and hating what will deceive and misguide it.*

*The Quran removes all the sicknesses that invoke false desires until the heart becomes pure and, therefore, its desires become pure and it returns to the natural state (fitrah) that it was created in, just as the body returns to the natural state upon being treated. The heart will be nurtured with faith and the Quran such that it will become strong – for indeed the purification of the heart is like the growing of the body.*

Allah, the Most High, said,

*“And We reveal of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy for the believers...” [Surah Isra’ (17) : 82]*

*“It is guidance and a healing for those who believe.” [Surah Fussilat (41) : 44]*

### **13) SHAKE OFF YOUR DOUBT TO RELIGION**

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِّن دِينِي فَلَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِن أَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُم وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ {يونس/104}

Tell them: O YE PEOPLE! If you are still in doubt concerning my religion, know that I do not serve those whom you serve besides Allah. I only serve Allah Who will take your souls (at death): I am commanded to be (in the ranks) of the Believers.

#### Brief Explanation<sup>xii</sup>:

*This verse asks prophet Muhammad ﷺ to let the mankind know that ‘I worship only that One, who has full power over your life: He has complete authority and power to let you live as long as He wills and cause you to die at any moment He wills. That is why I am fully convinced that I should submit and surrender, worship, serve and obey Him alone’.*

*Now let us consider why of all His characteristics, this quality of Allah was specifically cited here. This was to bring home to the people of Makkah that the doctrine of shirk (associating others with Allah in their power and stature) was absolutely false. For they also believed (and all the mushriks have always believed) that death is entirely in the hands of Allah, the Lord of the universe, and none else has any power over it; so much so that they confessed that even those beings, whom they believed to be partners with God in other qualities and powers of, His, could not avert death even from themselves. Thus, the mention of this quality of Allah along with the statement of the doctrine of Tawhid (Unity of God) has been made to serve as a proof of that creed. That is, I serve only Him for He alone has the full power over life and death. Why should, then, I serve others who have no power at all over their own lives and deaths, not to mention the lives and deaths of others? The eloquence and force of the statement have been enhanced manifold by saying, “Who gives you death” instead of “Who gives me death”. For this contains the statement of the doctrine, its proof and invitation to it, all the three combined in one concise sentence. Had it been said, “I serve that one Who gives me death” then it would have implied, “I alone should serve Him.” But by saying, “Who gives you death”*

*the implication is: It is not only I, who should serve Him, but you also should serve Him. For it is absolutely wrong to serve any other than Allah, Who alone has such powers.*

#### 14) FOLLOW THE TRUTH FOR YOUR OWN SOULS

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنِ اهْتَدَى فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِوَكِيلٍ  
{يونس/108}

Say: "O YE PEOPLE! The truth has come to you from your Lord. Whoever chooses to follow the true guidance does so for his own good; and whoever chooses to go astray, does so at his own peril. I am not responsible for your conduct.'

##### Brief Explanation<sup>xiii</sup>:

*It is the final, decisive word which makes it clear that everyone chooses his or her way as they please after the truth has been given to all by their Lord. Hence, "whoever chooses to follow the true guidance, does so for his own good; and whoever chooses to go astray, does so at his own peril." (Verse 108) The Prophet is not required to force people to follow divine guidance. He only conveys to them his message and leaves them to choose freely, making it clear that everyone will bear the results of his or her choice.*

#### 15) FEAR YOUR LORD

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ إِنَّ زَلْزَلَةَ السَّاعَةِ شَيْءٌ عَظِيمٌ {الحج/1}

O YE PEOPLE!

Fear your Lord, for the convulsion of the hour (of judgement) will be a thing terrible!

##### Brief Explanation<sup>xiv</sup>:

*According to the early commentators, this earthquake will be a prelude to Resurrection. This will probably take place when the earth will begin to rotate in the reverse order, and the sun will rise in the west. In a lengthy tradition reported by Ibn Jarir, Tabarani and Ibn Abi Hatim from Abu Hurairah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) has stated that when the first Trumpet will be blown, there will be a general confusion. At the second all people will die and at the third they will be brought back to life and presented before Allah. At the first blowing of the Trumpet, the earth will begin to rock like a boat which is beaten about by huge waves, or like a hanging lamp which is moved from side to side by a strong wind.*

*This condition has been depicted in the Quran at several other places. For instance (Surah Al-Waqiah, Ayat 6); (Surah Al-Haqqa, Ayats 13-14); (Surah Al-Muzzammil, Ayats 14,17-18); (Surah An-Naziat, Ayats 6-9) and (Surah Al-Zalzalah, Ayats 1-3).*

## 16) SHAKE OFF YOUR DOUBT TO RESURRECTION

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبُعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن تُّرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنَبِّئَنَّ لَكُمْ وَنُقَرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِنَبْلُوَكُمْ أَشَدَّكُمْ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُتَوَفَّىٰ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْذَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مِن بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ {الحج/5}

O YE PEOPLE! If you should be in doubt about the Resurrection, then [consider that] indeed, We created you from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then from a clinging clot, and then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed - that We may show you. And We settle in the wombs whom We will for a specified term, then We bring you out as a child, and then [We develop you] that you may reach your [time of] maturity. And among you is he who is taken in [early] death, and among you is he who is returned to the most decrepit [old] age so that he knows, after [once having] knowledge, nothing. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down upon it rain, it quivers and swells and grows [something] of every beautiful kind.

### Brief Explanation<sup>xv</sup>:

*Resurrection is a return to a life that has been in existence. Thus, by human standards, it is easier than the origination of life in the first place, although, by God's standards, the notion of easier or more difficult does not arise. To Him, initiating something out of nothing and restoring a life that had ended are the same. Both are the result of His will: "When He wills a thing to be, He only says to it, 'Be'— and it is." (36: 82) But the Quran addresses people according to their own standards, rational thinking and understanding. It directs their hearts to reflect on what they see happening at every moment in their lives. If only they would reflect on it carefully, they would realize that it is miraculous. But to appreciate it as such, they need to look at it with an open heart and a reflective mind. Alas! They rarely ever do so.*

*Let them ask themselves: what are these people all around them? What are they made of? Where have they come from? What were they before they took this shape and form? And what stages have they gone through? "We have created you out of dust<sup>1</sup>." The man is a son of the earth. He originated, took form and lived out of its dust. Not a single element does man have in his constitution but has its parallel in the elements present in mother earth. The only exception is that gentle secret God placed in him when He breathed His soul into—man, thus bringing about the great difference between man and those elements constituting dust. The fact remains, however, that man is closely related to dust both in his constitution and his food. All tangible elements in man are from the dust of the earth. Nevertheless, the gap is great between dust and man. The basic atoms that are present in dust are far removed from this highly complex creation that acts on his own behest and responds to others. The human creature is influenced by different factors in his surroundings and similarly influences others. His feet are placed on earth, but his soul and heart can fly to heaven. His mind floats to realms beyond that of the physical world that includes the dust from which he was first created.*

*It is a great divide separating the first status and the last. It points to the power that can bring about the resurrection, having brought about the initial creation. Then out of a gamete, then out of a clinging cell mass, then out of an organized and unorganized embryo, so that We might make things*

<sup>1</sup> Recent scientific studies have found origins of life from clay (Nature World News, 2013; Page, 2013; Science Daily, 2013).

*clear to you. We cause to rest in the [mothers] wombs whatever We please for an appointed term, and then We bring you forth as infants.*

*Again the gulf between the primitive, idle elements found in dust and the gamete, a single living cell, is great indeed. It enfolds the great secret of life about which human beings know only a very little, despite the passage of millions of years in which countless numbers of idle elements have been transformed into living cells in a continuous process that never stops. It is a secret that we can only observe and record, without ever being able to initiate, no matter how ambitious we may be. And then there are other secrets, like that of the transformation of the gamete into a clinging cell mass, and the transformation of this cell mass into an embryo which is then transformed into a human being.*

*What is this gamete, then? It begins with man's semen, a single drop of which contains many thousands of sperms. Yet only one of these countless sperms, or gametes, is needed to fertilize the woman's egg, which is then implanted in the uterus. In this little fertilized egg, implanted in the uterus, are stored, by God's will and power, all the unique characteristics of the human being yet to be born: his physical appearance including his height, stature, beauty, strength and health status as well as his mental and psychological characteristics, including his tendencies, natural likes and dislikes, abilities and talents. Who can imagine that all this is stored in this little speck clinging to the uterus which, in time, becomes such a complex being? Yet every individual in this race is extremely different from all other individuals, to the extent that no two individuals are ever identical over any period of time.*

*Then this clinging cell mass is transformed into an embryo which at first is without shape or distinction. Subsequently a transformation overtakes it to give it a form that begins with a skeleton that is later fleshed up. Alternatively, the uterus may reject it if God wills not to let it complete its cycle. "So that We might make things clear to you." This clause indicates that there is a pause between the embryonic stage and the child. This clause refers to the numerous signs of God's limitless power, and the reference coincides with the appearance of organs in the embryo.*

*The verse moves on to refer to the next stage in the development of the foetus: "We cause to rest in the [mothers] wombs whatever We please for an appointed term." Whatever God wills to complete its cycle will rest in its mother's womb until its time of birth. "Then We bring you forth as infants." Again we say, what a wide gulf separating the first stage and this final one!*

*In terms of time, it is normally nine months, but in terms of the difference between the nature of the gamete and the nature of the child, it is far greater than that. The gamete cannot be seen by the naked eye, while the child is a highly complex and sophisticated creation, with numerous organs and systems, features, qualities, talents, tendencies and desires. An intelligent mind can only appreciate this great divide after it has humbly reflected, time and again, on the great power behind creation.*

*The surah continues with a new cycle that starts with the newborn child, after it has left its hiding place where it went through a series of great miracles, away from all beholders. Then it is time for a new phase, so that "you may grow up and attain your prime." You will attain your full growth: physically, mentally and psychologically. The gulf between a newborn child and an adult, in their respective characteristics, is much wider than the time separating one from the other. This gulf,*

however, is bridged by God's will who has given the little infant all the characteristics of a mature adult. What is more is that He has given this child a great variety of talents and potentialities that may rise to the surface at their appropriate times. It is the same divine will that gives the zygote, as it is implanted in the uterus, all the qualities of a human child. Yet that fertilized egg is the product of worthless fluid.

"Some of you die young, and some live on to abject old age when all that they once knew they know no more." (Verse 5) The one who dies young meets at an early stage the end of every living thing. As for the ones who live to old age, they provide an important case for reflection. Although each one was a person of knowledge, maturity and wisdom, now they are again children in their feelings, reactions, awareness, knowledge, dealings and management. Like a child, one little thing may give them great pleasure, and another may cause them to cry. Their memory retains very little and retrieves very little. And like a child, they take events individually, unable to relate them to one another or to look ahead to the conclusion to which they lead. They simply forget the beginning before they reach the end. It is like God says: "When all that they once knew they know no more." They lose the knowledge that once was a source of pride to them, leading them even to argue about God, His existence and His attributes. Now all such knowledge disappears from their minds and consciousness.

The verse then moves on to portray other scenes of creation and living creatures on earth and in the world of plants. "You can see the earth dry and barren; and [suddenly,] when We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of radiant bloom." The state of being 'dry and barren', which is expressed in the Arabic text with one word, *hāmīdah*, is a state in between life and death. This is how the earth is when it is starved of water, the basic ingredient for life and the living. Thus, when rain water is poured over it, 'it stirs and swells.' This is a remarkable movement which the Qur'ān recorded many centuries before human science. When the soil is very dry and then rain falls over it, it makes a movement like shaking or stirring. It absorbs the water and swells. It is then full of life, bringing forth blooming vegetation that radiates pleasure. Is there anything more pleasing to the eye than seeing life bloom in an area that has long remained barren?

Here we see how the Quran speaks of a bond between all living creatures, citing them all as one of God's numerous signs. This is a remarkable reference to the fact that the essence of life is one in all the living, and to the unity of the will that brings life into being on earth, as in plants, animals and man.

## 17) YE ARE WARNED

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّمَا أَنَا لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ {الحج/49}

SAY: "O YE PEOPLE! I am (sent) to you only to give a clear warning".

Brief Explanation<sup>xvi</sup>:

The role of Prophet ﷺ is to convey the clear message. It is up to people to accept this message or not. In either case, they would face the consequences of their actions themselves.

*In this verse, the Prophet's task is clearly stated as one of giving people a clear and plain warning, that leaves no room for ambiguity. This fits the immediate situation of stubborn rejection of God's message that makes people hasten their own doom. The final destiny is clearly stated. Those who believe and put their faith into practice, so as to 'do righteous deeds' will have their reward which consists of forgiveness by their Lord of all sins that they may have committed or duties they may have omitted to do. Such forgiveness is coupled with 'a most excellent sustenance' that they receive with dignity.*

*Those who endeavour to stop God's revelations from addressing people's hearts, and God's laws from being implemented in their life, will be the ones to suffer in the blazing fire. The expression the Surah uses makes them the owners of this fire, which is in stark contrast with the excellent sustenance the believers receive. God always protects His message from the wicked designs of unbelievers who try to prevent its implementation. Similarly, He protects it from Satan's scheming and his attempts to manoeuvre his way into the hopes entertained by God's messengers who are, after all, human. Although God's messengers are given immunity from Satan, their human nature makes them hope that their efforts in advocating divine faith will be enough to remove all impediments and ensure a speedy victory. Satan tries to exploit these hopes in order to force the message out of its fundamental principles and proper methods. But God renders all Satan's schemes futile, preserves His message, making its principles and values clear, perfects His revelations and removes all doubt that may surround its values and method of action.*

### 18) YE SHOULD CALL ONLY GOD

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضَرْبَ مَثَلٍ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوْ اجْتَمَعُوا لَهُ وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ {الحج/73}

O YE PEOPLE! An example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you invoke besides Allah will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for that purpose. And if the fly should steal away from them a [tiny] thing, they could not recover it from him. Weak are the pursuer and pursued.

#### Brief Explanation<sup>xvii</sup>:

*Quran uses various literary and psychological methods to effectively convey its noble message and to educate the hearts and minds of its listeners. One of these methods is the use of parables.*

*Allah SWT mentions about the use of parables in Quran:*

*Indeed, We have offered in this Quran every evidence and lesson by way of parables and examples for people so that they may think and take heed (Zumar 39:27)*

*So God propounds parables for human beings, that they may reflect on them and infer the necessary lessons. (Ibrahim 14:25)*

*Parables help people understand abstract concepts by alluding to shared experiences and by allowing the readers to emphasize with participants or to feel as if they are direct observers in these experiences.*

*The address is in current verse through used parable is universal, it includes everyone anywhere in the world, and the declaration is loud and clear: "Mankind!" When people have been gathered to listen, they are told that they are about to be given a statement of a general principle, not a particular case applicable on a certain occasion. "An aphorism is set forth; hearken, then, to it." It is a statement of fact that applies in all situations: "Those beings whom you invoke instead of God cannot create a fly, even though they were to join all their forces to that end." All false deities, whether they be idols and statues, human beings, traditions and values, to whom you appeal for support and with whom you seek to achieve victory and high esteem, are incapable of creating a fly, even if they muster all their forces, utilize all their knowledge and channel all their resources into one supreme effort. Indeed, the creation of a mere fly, that small and abject creature, defies all the harnessed powers of such false gods.*

*Creating a fly is just as impossible, for anyone or thing other than God, as creating a camel or an elephant, because the fly also demonstrates the great secret of life. Hence, it is placed on the same level as camels and elephants, with regard to its miraculous creation. The Quranic aphorism, however, cites the case of a little, insignificant fly in order to generate a more profound feeling of powerlessness, without compromising the underlying principle.*

*The Surah adds another dimension in describing their powerlessness: "If a fly robs them of anything, they cannot rescue it from him!" False deities, be they idols or humans, cannot retrieve anything from a fly when it robs them of it. Flies can rob people of that which is precious indeed. At the same time, a fly carries agents of some very serious diseases, such as tuberculosis, typhoid, dysentery and conjunctivitis. It can deprive a person of his eyes or other organs, or indeed deprive him of his life. A weak and contemptible fly can rob a human being of what he can never retrieve.*

*Here again, we note how the Quranic style uses facts in the most effective way. Had the text referred to lions and similar wild animals adding that men cannot rescue anything such animals rob them of, it would have generated an air of strength and force, rather than weakness. Besides, the most powerful animals cannot rob man of anything greater than what a fly can rob him of.*

*This powerful image stating a clear aphorism concludes with a simple comment: "Weak indeed is the seeker, and weak the sought!" This comment further emphasizes the effects generated by the verse as a whole. At this moment when we realize how weak and contemptible these false deities are, the Surah denounces the unbelievers for their faulty concept of God, clearly stating God's power: "No true understanding of God have they. God is certainly Most Powerful, Almighty." How could they understand Him as He really is when they associate with Him such powerless deities that cannot even create a fly? What understanding of God have they, when they see His highly sophisticated creation and yet they consider as equal to Him beings that cannot create even a little fly? They even invoke such powerless creatures which cannot retrieve anything flies take away from them, instead of invoking God. So, how can it be claimed that they have a proper concept of God? This is a damning comment at a point which should arouse feelings of submission to God alone.*

## 19) THOU ART EVER TOILING ON TOWARDS THY LORD

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمَلَأَ قِيَهُ {الإنشفاق/6}

O YE PEOPLE! Surely you are exerting yourself to your Lord with great exertion, then you will be meeting Him.

Brief Explanation<sup>xviii</sup>:

Many think that all the efforts and endeavours in the world are confined to worldly life and motivated by worldly desires, yet the truth is that we are all moving, consciously or unconsciously, towards our Lord and we ultimately have to appear before Him in any case with all that we done in this world.

Mankind is addressed in this verse and shown a road that if it were to think about it carefully, and use its sense and intelligence, it could exert its efforts in the right direction that will ensure for it welfare, well-being and safety in this world, as well as in the Hereafter. First, it has been pointed out that man, whether he is good or bad, believer or non-believer, has the natural tendency to exert himself in order to achieve his goal. A good-natured person will work hard and adopt lawful means to acquire his livelihood and necessities of life. A bad person cannot obtain his needs and objective without working hard. Thieves, robbers, rogues, cheats and looters apply their minds and exert their physical strength in order to achieve their objective. Secondly, it has been pointed out that if the intelligent man were to think carefully, all his movements and pauses are stations of a long journey he is going through, though unconsciously. This journey will end at his presence before Allah, that is, at death. This is stated in the phrase *ila rabbika* 'to your Lord'. This is a statement of reality which none can deny. All efforts, [good or bad], must end with death. The third point is that after death, in the presence of his Lord, he will have to give an account of his movements and deeds, and of his efforts. This is rationally necessary and justified, so that the consequences of good and bad may be separately known, because such distinction is not known in this life. A good person may work hard for a month or so in order to obtain his livelihood and necessities of life, but thieves and looters may obtain them overnight. If there is no time of reckoning or punishment, both of them [the good and the bad] will be equal, which is contrary to reason and justice. Every person has to meet his Lord and to present himself before him to give the account of his deeds.

Another possible interpretation is that the attached pronoun (hee) refers to verb 'kadh' (working hard). Given this interpretation, the translation of the verse would be: "O man, you have to work hard constantly to reach your Lord, then you have to meet it." And the sense would be: 'you have to meet the good or bad consequences of your working hard.'

**20) DO YOUR DUTY TO YOUR LORD**

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ وَأَخْشَوْا يَوْمًا لَا يَجْزِي وَالِدٌ عَنْ وَلَدِهِ وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ هُوَ جَازٍ عَنِ وَالِدِهِ شَيْئًا إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ {لقمان/33}

O YE PEOPLE! Fear your Lord and fear a Day when no father will avail his son, nor will a son avail his father at all. Indeed, the promise of Allah is truth, so let not the worldly life delude you and be not deceived about Allah by the Deceiver.

Brief Explanation<sup>xix</sup>:

*Drawing on the great danger presented by a stormy sea and how it puts things*

into perspective as described in previous passages in this surah, an even greater danger - in comparison with which the danger of the sea appears ever so small- is reminded about in this verse. This is the danger of the day when all relations are severed, parents and children are separated and preoccupied with their own positions; when each soul stands on its own, without support, unable to call upon anyone for help.

The horror described here is psychological, measured by its effect on hearts and souls. Nothing severs blood relations and ties between parent and child, and nothing makes everyone preoccupied solely with their own positions unless it be a fear totally unknown to people. The call to fear God is accordingly the call which can save humanity on that day. God's promise is indeed true and it will never fail. There can be no avoidance of this very difficult situation. No one can escape the accurate reckoning and the fair reward, when none can avail another of anything. "Let not, then, the life of this world delude you." It is full of lure, luxury and comfort, but it is limited in duration, and it is only a test to determine the eventual reward. "And let not deceptive thoughts about God delude you." Let no comfort, work, or interest delude you. Above all, let no devil tempt you, for there are many devils, such as money, power, authority, desire, fancy and misdirected passion. Each has its own lure and temptation which can be very deluding. Fear of God and remembrance of the Day of Judgement, however, should be enough to protect believers from all such temptations if their belief is firm that this life is temporary and our real purpose is to achieve success in the hereafter.

## 21) CERTAINLY THE PROMISE OF GOD IS TRUE

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ {فاطر/5}

O YE PEOPLE! Assuredly Allah's promise is true. So let not the life of the world delude you, and let not the Deluder delude you concerning Allah.

Brief explanation<sup>xx</sup>:

"The promise" in this ayah implies the promise of the Hereafter to which allusion was made in the preceding sentence, saying: "And to Allah return all matters."

When we get engrossed in the pleasures of this world and run towards what perceives to be shining gold, we are deceived. Life of this world is very short and has to end one day. That would be the days when we will begin our new life. The life whose success will depend on what we do in this short tenure we are sent to spend on earth. If we remain deceived that the world is an end in itself and that there is no Hereafter when one will have to render an account of one's deeds: or that even if there is the Hereafter, the one who is enjoying life here will enjoy life there, too.

Satan, presented in this verse as a great deceiver, deceives us by making us believe:

(1) that there is no creator at all or

(2) that Allah after having once created the world, has retired and has now practically nothing to do with the universe anymore or

(3) that Allah no doubt is running the universe, but He has taken no responsibility of providing guidance to man: therefore, revelation and prophethood are a mere deception and/or

(4) that since Allah is All- Forgiving and All-Merciful. He will forgive one whatever sins one might have committed, and that He has some beloved ones too: if one remains attached to them, success and salvation are assured.

Prophet ﷺ advised us to live in this world like a traveller. If traveller starts building property and loving a place on the way through, remaining busy in decorating it and glorifying it, he is certainly not be able to do enough to reach his real destination. We should, therefore, stay focussed on our real goal and not get deceptive by lures of this world.

## 22)IT IS YE THAT HAVE NEED OF GOD

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ {فاطر/15}

O YE PEOPLE!

You are they who stand in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy.

Brief Explanation<sup>xxi</sup>:

If a person is under the delusion that Allah stands in need of his or her help and if he or she doesn't accept Him as God, His Godhead will fail, and if he or she does not serve and worship Him, He will incur some loss, then it should be known very clearly that it is you who needs him and depend on him in everything. You cannot remain alive for a moment if He does not keep you alive, and does not provide you with the means by which you remain alive in the world and function. Therefore, when you are told to adopt His service and obedience, it is not because Allah stands in need of it, but because upon it depends on your own success here as well as in the Hereafter. If you do not do so, you will be harming your own selves only, and not Allah in any way.

The word used in this ayah 'Ghani' implies that Allah is the Owner of everything: He is Self-sufficient and Independent of all. He does not stand in need of anyone's help. The word 'Hamid' implies that He is Self-Praiseworthy: someone may praise Him, or may not, but He alone is worthy of hamd (praise and gratitude). These two attributes have been used together because one would be 'ghani' even if one did not do any good to anyone by one's wealth. In such a case, one would be ghani but not hamid One will be hamid only in case one does not draw any benefit for oneself but benefits others in every way from the treasures of his wealth and resources. Since Allah is perfect in these two attributes, it has been said: "He is not just Ghani (self-sufficient) but such Ghani as is worthy of every kind of praise and gratitude, for He is fulfilling your needs as well as the needs of all other creatures, including those who do not accept his obedience. But those who disobey are harming their own selves despite being reminded and warned.

## 23)THE MOST RIGHTEOUS IS THE MOST HONOURED

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ {الحجرات/13}

O YE PEOPLE! O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

Brief Explanation<sup>xxii</sup>:

*In the preceding verses, the Muslims were addressed and given necessary instructions to safeguard the Muslim community against social evils. In this verse the whole of mankind has been addressed to reform it of the great evil that has always been causing universal disruption in the world - Racism, that is, the prejudices due to race, color, language, country, and nationality.*

*On account of these prejudices man in every age has generally been discarding humanity and drawing around himself some small circles and regarding those born within those circles as his own people and those outside them as others. These circles have been drawn on the basis of accidental birth and not on rational and moral grounds. In some cases, their basis is the accident of being born in a particular family, tribe, or race, and in some particular geographical region, or in a nation having a particular color or speaking a particular language. Then the discrimination between one's own people and others is not only confined to this that those who are looked upon as one's own people are shown greater love and cooperation than others, but this discrimination has assumed the worst forms of hatred, enmity, contempt and tyranny. New philosophies have been propounded for it, new religions invented, new codes of law made and new moral principles framed; so much so that nations and empires have made this distinction a permanent way of life with them and practiced it for centuries.*

*The Jews on this very basis regarded the children of Israel as the chosen people of God and even in the practice of their religious rites looked upon the non-Jews as inferior to the Jews in rights and rank. This very discrimination gave birth to class distinctions (varnashrama) among the Hindus according to which superiority of the Brahmins was established, all other human beings came to be regarded as inferior and unclean and the shudras cast into the depths of disgrace and degradation. Every person can see for himself even in this 20th century what atrocities have been committed against the colored people in Africa, Australia, Asia and America on account of the distinction between the white, brown and the black. The treatment that the Europeans meted out to the Red Indian race in America and to the weak nations of Asia and Africa had the same concept underlying it. It was this ras*

*They thought that the rights and property and honor of all those who had been born outside the frontiers of their own land and nation were lawful for them and they had the right to plunder and take them as their slaves and exterminate them if need be. The worst examples of how the nationalism of the western nations has turned one nation against the others and made it their bloodthirsty enemy have been seen in the wars of the recent past and are being seen even in the present time. In particular, if what was manifested by the racism of the Nazi Germany and the concept of the superiority of the Nordic race in the last World War is kept in view. One can easily judge how stupendous and devastating is the error for whose reform this verse of the Quran was revealed.*

*In this brief verse, Allah has drawn the attention of all mankind to three cardinal truths:*

(1) *The origin of all of you is one and the same. Your whole species has sprung up from one man and one woman. All your races that are found in the world today are, in fact, the branches of one initial race that started with one mother and one father. In this process of creation, there is no basis whatsoever for the divisions and distinctions in which you have involved yourselves because of your false notions. One God alone is your Creator. Different men have not been created by different gods. You have been made from one and the same substance. It is not so that some men have been made from some pure and superior substance and some other men from some impure and inferior substance. You have been created in one and the same way; it is not also so that different men have been created in different ways. And you are the offspring of the same parents; it is not so that in the beginning there were many human couples which gave birth to different populations in the different regions of the world.*

(2) *In spite of being one in origin, it was natural that you should be divided into nations and tribes. Obviously, all the men on the earth could not belong to one and the same family. With the spread of the race, it was inevitable that countless families should arise, and then tribes and nations should emerge from the families. Similarly, it was inevitable that after settling in different regions of the earth, there should be differences of colours, features, languages and ways of living among the people, and it was also natural that those living in the same region should be closer in affinity and those living in remote regions not so close. But this natural difference never demanded that distinctions of inequality, of high and low, of noble and mean, should be established on its basis, that one race should claim superiority over the other, the people of one colour should look down upon the people of other colours, and that one nation should take preference over the other without any reason. The Creator had divided the human communities into nations and tribes for that was a natural way of cooperation and distinction between them. In this way alone could a fraternity, a brotherhood, a tribe and a nation combine to give birth to a common way of life and to cooperate with each other in the affairs of the world. But it was all due to satanic ignorance that the differences among mankind created by Allah to be a means of recognition, were turned into a means of mutual boasting and hatred, which led mankind to every kind of injustice and tyranny.*

(3) *The only basis of superiority and excellence that there is, or can be, between man and man is that of moral excellence. As regards birth, all men are equal, for their Creator is One, their substance of creation is one, and their way of creation is one, and they are descended from the same parents. Moreover, a person's being born in a particular country, nation, or clan is just accidental. Therefore, there is no rational ground on account of which one person may be regarded as superior to the other. The real thing that makes one person superior to others is that one should be more God-conscious, a greater avoider of evils, and a follower of the way of piety and righteousness. Such a man, whether he belongs to any race, any nation and any country, is valuable and worthy on account of his personal merit. And the one who is the reverse of him in character is in any case an inferior person whether he is black or white, born in the east or the west.*

*These same truths that have been stated in this brief verse of the Quran have been explained in greater detail by the Prophet (peace be upon him) in his addresses and traditions. In the speech that he made on the conquest of Makkah, after going round the Kabah, he said:*

*Thank God Who has removed from you the blemish of ignorance and its arrogance. O people, men are divided into classes: the pious and righteous, who are honourable in the sight of Allah, and the*

*sinful and vicious, who are contemptible in the sight of Allah, whereas all men are the children of Adam and Adam had been created by Allah from clay. (Baihaqi, Tirmidhi).*

*On the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage, in the midst of the Tashriq days, he addressed the people, and said:*

*O people, be aware: your God is One. No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab, and no non-Arab any superiority over an Arab, and no white one has any superiority over a black one, and no black one any superiority over a white one, except on the basis of taqwa (piety). The most honourable among you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most pious and righteous of you. Say if I have conveyed the Message to you? And the great congregation of the people responded, saying: Yes, you have, O Messenger of Allah. Thereupon the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Then let the one who is present convey it to those who are absent. (Baihaqi).*

*In a Hadith he has said: You are all the children of Adam, and Adam was created from the dust. Let the people give up boasting of their ancestors, otherwise they will stand more degraded than a mean insect in the sight of Allah. (Bazzar).*

*In another Hadith the Prophet(peace be upon him) said: Allah will not inquire about your lineage on the Day of Resurrection. The most honourable in the sight of Allah is he who is most pious. (Ibn Jarir). In still another Hadith he said: Allah does not see your outward appearances and your possessions, but He sees your hearts and your deeds. (Muslim, Ibn Majah).*

*These teachings have not remained confined to words only, but Islam has practically established a universal brotherhood of the believers on the basis, which does not allow any distinction on account of color, race, language, country and nationality which is free from every concept of high and low, clean and unclean, mean and respectable, which admits all human beings with equal rights, whether they belong to any race and nation, any land or region. Even the opponents of Islam have to admit that no precedent is found in any religion and any system of the success with which the principle of human equality and unity has been given practical shape in the Muslim society, nor has it ever been found. Islam is the only religion which has welded and combined innumerable races and communities scattered in all corners of the earth into one universal ummah.*

*In this connection, a misunderstanding also needs to be removed. In the case of marriage, the importance that Islamic law gives to kufv (likeness of status) has been taken by some people in the sense that some brotherhoods are noble and some mean, and matrimonial relations between them are objectionable. But this, in fact, is a wrong idea. According to the Islamic law, every Muslim man can marry every Muslim woman, but the success of the matrimonial life depends on maximum harmony and conformity between the spouses as regards habits, characteristics and ways of life, family traditions and economic and social status, so that they may get on well with each other. This is the real object of being equal and alike. Where there is unusual difference and disparity between the man and the woman in this regard, lifelong companionship will be difficult. That is why the Islamic law disapproves of such intermarriages, and not for the reason that one of the spouses is noble and the other mean, but for the reason that in case there is a clear and apparent difference and distinction in status, there would be a greater possibility of the failure of the matrimonial life if the marriage relationship was established.*

*The standards of high and low that the people have set up of their own accord, accordingly, are not acceptable to and approved by Allah. May be that the one who has been regarded as a man of high rank in the world is declared as the lowest of the low in the final judgment of Allah, and maybe that the one who has been looked upon as a very low person here, attains to a very high rank there. The real importance is not of the honor and dishonor of the world but of the honor and dishonor that one will receive from Allah. Therefore, what man should be most concerned about is that he should create in himself those real qualities and characteristics which make him worthy of honor in the sight of Allah.*

#### **24)DON'T BE DELUDED AWAY FROM THE TRUTH**

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْكُمْ هَلْ مِنْ خَالِقٍ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ {فاطر/3}

O YE PEOPLE! Remember the favor of Allah upon you. Is there any creator other than Allah who provides for you from the heaven and earth? There is no deity except Him, so how are you deluded?

Brief Explanation<sup>xxiii</sup>:

*This verse is reminding people of God's blessings, emphasizing that God is the only One who creates and provides sustenance for His creation, and wondering at how people lose sight of this truth when it is so clear and obvious.*

*Nothing is needed more than the mention of God's blessings for people to see, feel and recognize them. Nevertheless, they do forget them. The earth around them and the skies above them give them abundant blessings and unlimited sustenance, in every step and at every moment. It is God the Creator who gives all this. They are asked here whether there is a different creator who provides them with all the good things in their hands. Obviously, they cannot say this. Indeed, they did not even claim this during their worst period of idolatry, associating all sorts of partners with God. Since there is none other than God to create and provide, why do they not remember and express gratitude? Why do they not address their gratitude to Him alone and express their thanks by praises and prayers? Indeed "There is no deity other than Him." How is it that they turn away from this indisputable truth? "How can you turn away?"*

*It is most singular that anyone should turn away from this clear truth, evidenced by the constant sustenance they are provided with from heaven and earth. Even more singular is for a person to turn away from it all while admitting that all sustenance comes from God alone.*

#### **25)WHAT STOPS YOU FROM COMING BACK TO YOUR LORD, O MANKIND?**

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّبَكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ {الإنفطار/6}

O YE PEOPLE! what has deceived you concerning your Gracious Lord

Brief Explanation<sup>xxiv</sup>:

*The beautiful verse is calling all human beings to reject the delusions and deception and come back to their Lord. What has come between us and our merciful Lord? What is stopping us from embracing the truth and reject the deception we have fallen into. Life of this world is short and each moment is*

*taking us nearer and nearer to the time when we will leave everything we possess and go empty handed to meet our Lord. How can we be disloyal to our Master who gave us everything, who fed us even when we were in wombs of our mothers. Our Merciful Lord is calling us to come back to Him. To become the one who love him and He loves them. Why has human being forgotten the promise he made to his Lord? What is luring us away from the truth. When would the time come when we will change? How much more lectures do we need? How much more books do we need to read? How much more advice do we need to be given? When will the time come when we will go running towards our Lord? When will the time come when we will meet our Lord with tearful eyes and repent for the hours and days we kept running away from Him? His mercy is waiting for us? When will rise up and embrace the message?*

*“Has not the time yet arrived for the believers that their hearts should melt with the remembrance of Allah and should submit to the Truth sent down by Him” (Quran 57:16)*

*O Allah! Yes, the time has come. I repent to you sincerely my Lord. Forgive me and make me from among those who you love. I want to be under your love and your mercy. I want only you my Allah. Make me from among your sincere servants. I return to you my Lord with tears in my eyes, my head bowed down with shame and my heart filled with hope for your mercy. To You we belong and to You we shall return.*

**Notes:**

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- i (Quran 2:21 – Explanation derived from Maarif ul Quran)  
ii (Quran 2:168 – Derived from Maarif ul Quran and Fi Zilal il Quran)  
iii (Quran 2:179 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran)  
iv (Quran 4:1 – Explanation derived from Maarif ul Quran and Fi Zilal il Quran)  
v (Quran 4:170 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran)  
vi (Quran 4:173 - Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran)  
vii (Quran 5:130 – Explanation derived from Tafsir Ibn Abbas and Fi Zilal il Quran)  
viii (Quran 7:26 – Explanation derived from Tafheem ul Quran)  
ix (Quran 7:35 – Explanation derived from Maarif ul Quran)  
x (Quran 7:158 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran, explanation of word Umme by Shiekh Saleh Al-Munajjid, Tafsir Al-Qurtubi and prophecies about Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as explained by Dr. Zakir Naik)  
xi (Quran 10:57 – Explanation derived from explanation of diseases of hearts elaborated by Al-Basair Islamic Media)  
xii (Quran 10:104 – Explanation derived from Tafheem ul Quran)  
xiii (Quran 10:108 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran)  
xiv (Quran 22:1 – Explanation derived from Tafheem ul Quran)  
xv (Quran 22:5 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran)  
xvi (Quran 22:49 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran and Siraj ul Bayan)  
xvii (Quran 22:73 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran)  
xviii (Quran 84:6 – Explanation derived from Tafheem ul Quran and Maarif ul Quran)  
xix (Quran 31:33 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran)  
xx (Quran 35:5 – explanation derived from Tafheem ul Quran)  
xxi (Quran 35:15 – Explanation derived from Tafheem ul Quran)  
xxii (Quran 49:13 – Explanation derived from Tafheem ul Quran)  
xxiii (Quran 35:3 – Explanation derived from Fi Zilal il Quran)  
xxiv (Quran 82:6 – Explanation derived from a lecture by Dr. Yasir Qadhi)

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## BOOK DIGITIZATION AND DIGITAL ISLAMIC LIBRARIES – A CASE STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN ISLAMIC LIBRARY

Muhammad Nabeel Musharraf

### ABSTRACT:

Over the centuries, books are written and books are lost or destroyed. To stop that from continuing and passing on essential knowledge to next generations, preservation of books is an indispensable need. Australian Islamic Library, case study in this research paper, aims at providing digital books in multiple languages to researchers, educators, students and print-disabled readers across the globe. In this paper, we have discussed some potential benefits of books digitization<sup>1</sup> and how Australian Islamic Library is undertaking this task. The paper also analysis the concept from logical, legal and Islamic viewpoints focussing on aspects related to copyrighting of Islamic material and selling them for a cost. In doing so, cases from other international book digitization efforts have also been discussed. A comprehensive overview of relevant fatawa of Islamic scholars have been presented which establish the permissibility of Islamic digital libraries operating on a non-profit basis for dawah purposes. The scope of this paper is restricted to Islamic books and multimedia and does not include any other copyrighted material, including books on secular subjects.

### INTRODUCTION:

In accordance with the commandment, *بلغوا عني ولو آية*, it is an obligation on Muslims to take the noble message of Islam to all humanity and invite them to this beautiful religion whose first command to mankind was '*IQRA*' (read). Books are one of the most useful methods of accomplishing this goal. Over the centuries, Islamic scholars have been producing a large amount of excellent scholarly works from across the globe. Much of has got lost in wars, natural disasters, and other catastrophes. Whatever is left is at risk of extinction at the hands of those with ill intentions. If serious efforts are not made to preserve this literature through book digitization and mass-scanning, next generations may not know much about our rich history and treasures of knowledge that our forefathers collected to enlighten the humanity.

In terms of contemporary literature, it is often inaccessible to people who do not live in the areas where it is produced. Even if becomes available, it happens at a very high cost. It is also seen commonly that in a few decades time, a large number of books vanish from the shelves as financial viability for printing them decreases and publishing company revenues decline. Printing accordingly

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<sup>1</sup> Alhaji (2009) points out the following 'digitization':

Digitization as the process of taking traditional library materials that are in form of books and papers and converting them to the electronic form where they can be stored and manipulated by a computer. Digitization means no new buildings are required, information sharing can be enhanced and redundancy of collections reduced. Digitization leads to the development of Internet in digitalized based libraries. As Internet is now the preferred form of publication and dissemination. Digital materials can be sorted, transmitted and retrieved easily and quickly. Access to electronic information is cheaper than its print counterpart when all the files are stored in an electronic warehouse with compatible facilities and equipment. Digital texts can be linked, thus made interactive; besides, it enhances the retrieval of more information.

gets discontinued despite books being still relevant and useful. Due to unavailability of digital versions and circulating copies, the hard-work put in by authors and their untiring efforts cease to benefit users despite being in the digital age where such scholarly works can potentially become an on-going sadaqa jariyah if availability in digital form is pursued. On top of that, people with disabilities, such as being print-disabled, cannot benefit from the treasure of knowledge locked in books behind paid walls.

In this paper, we will explore Australian Islamic Library, its purpose, objectives, and methodology in overcoming challenges summarized above.

Australian Islamic Library is a digital library built with a vision to provide all essential Islamic knowledge in multiple languages under one collection.

A Digital Library (also referred to as digital library or digital repository) is a special library with a focused collection of digital objects that can include text, visual material, audio material, video material, stored as electronic media formats (as opposed to print, microform, or other media), along with means for organizing, storing, and retrieving the files and media contained in the library collection (Alhaji, 2009; Trivedi, 2010). Digital libraries can vary immensely in size and scope, and can be maintained by individuals, organizations, or affiliated with established physical library buildings or institutions, or with academic institutions. The electronic content may be stored locally, or accessed remotely via computer networks. In the case of Australian Islamic Library, the interface of digital libraries accesses books and multimedia stored on external book-processing servers.

Trivedi (2010) mentions following benefits for digital libraries:

- Access to large amounts of information to users wherever they are and whenever they need it.
- Access to primary information sources.
- Support multimedia content along with text
- Network accessibility on Intranet and Internet
- User-friendly interface
- Hypertext links for navigation
- Client-server architecture
- Advanced search and retrieval.
- Integration with other digital libraries.

According to a study conducted by Alhaji (2009), benefits include improved access, wider access, improved information sharing and improved preservation. Further on in this paper, we will review how Australian Islamic Library is enabling these outcomes through its digital collection.

Australian Islamic Library and its bi-annual research journal work on an open-access basis. Books published by the library are also open-access and available free of cost to researchers, students and independent readers.

“Open Access seeks to return scholarly publishing to its original purpose: to spread knowledge and allow that knowledge to be built upon. Price barriers should not prevent students (or anyone) from getting access to research they need. Open Access, and the open availability and searchability of

scholarly research that it entails, will have a significant positive impact on everything from education to the practice of medicine to the ability of entrepreneurs to innovate” (*Why Open Access?*, 2015).

Later on in this paper, we will further take on analysis of copyrights and related aspects. However, before getting into the further discussion, we consider it useful to present following finding to set the context: “The claim that Open Access publishing undermines copyright is simply untrue. Publishing Open Access works, in fact, increases intellectual property protection for authors because their works are highly visible, clearly identifying their scholarly writing” (Missingham, 2013).

#### **OBJECTIVES OF AUSTRALIAN ISLAMIC LIBRARY:**

The purpose of Australian Islamic Library is to collect and present works of Islamic scholars from across the globe under one website for print-disabled readers and those who do not have this scholarly material available to them at their geographical locations. Library management also understands the fact that many readers who want to read certain books cannot do so because of lack of affordability, especially in West. Similarly, researchers living in Western countries also depend mainly on digital books, as much of the scholarly works that they want to refer to are either not available at their locations or available at a price which is considered too expensive to purchase.

Australian Islamic Library provides resources (books and multimedia) in multiple languages (wherever possible) and aims to strive further in this regard in order to serve information access rights of society overcoming language, financial and geographical barriers.

Australian Islamic Library also aims to serve information needs and quench thirst for knowledge from diverse members of the community. It not only caters for the need of the scholarly community, but also the general public. Books are accordingly available from beginner to advanced level of knowledge.

Library’s management understands the requirements of present age and does not rely solely on books. Audios, Videos, Live TV, and info-graphics are deployed to present information in smaller chunks and engage multiple senses in learning and information overview.

Library’s primary goal is to promote Islamic education and research. In accordance with this objective, the library also runs a research journal titled ‘Australian Journal of Humanities and Islamic Studies Research’.

It is a basic principle of scientific study and research to analyze all available information before drawing conclusions. Results get seriously distorted if the analysis is done to prove pre-concluded results or when only specific information or data resources are considered. This is the missing bit that leads to misunderstandings about Islam, islamophobia and its misrepresentation of Muslims. Library aims at providing scholarly works and various viewpoints from various schools of thought to clarify the subject and provide community, Muslim, and Non-Muslims, a readily available resource enabling access to a variety of valuable texts on Islam and Muslims, facilitating first-hand research and education.

#### **COMPLIANCE WITH COPYRIGHT LAWS AND USE OF LIBRARY RESOURCES:**

Australian Islamic Library is a 'library' and its role is to only 'present' information through books and multimedia. It does not own the entire content and cannot verify its correctness or appropriateness in entirety. Disclaimers are seen on various web pages of library's website clearly mentioning that opinions expressed are those of authors and library may or may not agree with them. Library also suggests viewer discretion for some content. According to library management team, users are responsible themselves for their use of material from library's website. Any action or use that can be considered inappropriate or unethical is strongly prohibited and opposed by library management.

Library has put following terms and conditions in place with regards to use of material presented through books, multimedia, and other means:

1. Library does not allow the use of any of material presented here for any type of monetary or financial gains.
2. Information provided should be used for research, education and self-betterment purposes only. Users are more than welcome to pass on information about this site to their friends and family members as long as 'fair-use' and 'fair-deal' aspects are taken into consideration.
3. While presenting this work, Library declares, that it has not read all the books in their entirety and accordingly DOES NOT endorse ALL views presented in those books or multimedia collections. As mentioned above, information provided on the website is for research and educational purposes and does not represent the personal opinion of site or library administrators. Any inappropriate contents can be highlighted using the relevant form available on website.
4. Library presents works from scholars belonging to different schools of thought. Readers may find some difference of opinion accordingly, which should be taken positively and explored in further depth with authentic scholars in the light of Quran and Sunnah. The difference of opinion is a natural phenomenon and even sometimes sahaba used to disagree with each other on certain matters. We know of examples where Prophet ﷺ declared both opinions to be correct. Pious predecessors have also accepted the difference of opinion on the matters of fiqh (and hence the four famous schools of 'jurisprudence').
5. Material provided on library website is for the type of users mentioned above (i.e. educational users or those who use it only for self-improvement purpose). No other use is permitted unless it falls under 'fair-use' and 'fair-deal' exceptions provided by local and international law.

This library website is mainly a compilation of hyperlinks to books and multimedia available online on renowned archives and repositories including archive.org, Scribd, Slideshare etc. (though there are some direct downloads present from library's web server).

Library trusts copyright protection systems of these websites to have worked as intended in filtering the copyright violations. We accept no responsibility for any copyright infringements associated with material available through hyperlinks as we do not host that material. It is to be noted that as per court ruling from 'The court of Justice and European Union', the owner of a website does not require authorization of the copyright holder to link to freely accessible copyrighted works on another site, even if Internet users get the impression that the work is appearing on the site that contains the link (ALRC, 2013; Shaw, Thornton, & Rauer, 2014).

For the limited amount of material downloadable directly from the library website, management has tried to ensure that there are no associated copyright violations.

However, the library still encourages any authors or publishers who have any genuine concerns with their work available on the library website (as direct download or external links), to let library staff know about their concerns. Library staff endeavors to remove such material from the website as soon as possible.

Library has tried to ensure compliance with copyright conditions through following means:

**1. Use of material already available on archives and document repositories.**

*Archiving servers used (e.g. Scribd, archive.org, and Slideshare) have their own copyright check systems which block users who infringe copyrights. Most of the books and multimedia provided on library website has not been uploaded by the library itself. Rather library team's prime focus was to identify, collect and present works available at various locations into one consolidated presentation scheme deployed on the library website. When digitizing the books itself, library staff takes utmost precaution to ensure that no copyright violations are made. Many books which can be massively useful for library readers are left un-digitized because of publisher's copyright information that their books cannot be stored in electronic retrieval systems. Library completely and strongly disagrees with this approach from publishers but still respects their opinion and does not digitize any book mentioning such requirement.*

**2. Not uploading any books which mention that they cannot be distributed or stored through electronic means (in continuity to point 1).**

*Some links are available for those books which only mention 'publishing rights reserved'. Library assumes that the meaning of 'publishing right reserved' is that "printing hard copies for commercial use" is reserved with printers and there are is no restriction on digitization UNLESS otherwise communicated to library staff. Library has shared links to books with relevant publisher information and does not claim those books to be its work under any condition accordingly protecting their ownership of the material.*

**3. Referencing those books which mention that permission has been obtained for distribution**

*Uploading books from sources which do not have copyright restrictions (May Allah reward them for their sincere effort which they do free from any monetary desires)*

**4. Uploading the hyperlinks to freely available material on the internet**

**5. Providing purchase options from publishers and running publisher ads (free of cost) in an effort to boost their sales related to works available on this library website as links.**

*Library strongly encourages its readers to purchase printed books.*

However, Library management totally acknowledges its weakness as human beings and request communication of information about any shortcomings in compliance to above points to library staff who are committed to attending to such requests as soon as possible.

Library also clarifies that it is not necessary that ALL of the above conditions are being fulfilled for every single book. However, there would be at least one or more conditions fulfilled in all cases which would form sufficient ground with regards to fair-use and fair-dealing.

Ownership of material/ literature on-site:

All material presented on this website is ownership of respective authors/ publishers and Library does not claim any of it to be its. Library neither intends to publish it for commercial purposes nor wants to gain any financial outcomes from their use.

This library site is completely not-for-profit and its staff gather finances through their own contributions to enable this website to remain functional just for the sake of Allah to seek His pleasure.

USE OF MATERIAL AVAILABLE ON-SITE:

Library only permits FAIR-USE and FAIR-DEALING for material and resources available on its website and advises readers to ensure compliance with their local and other applicable legislations.

Following is the sole purpose of Islamic literature available on site:

- Education
- Research
- Books Review/ Critique of various translations and literary works
- Referencing
- Provision of books to users who do not have access to Islamic literature due to their location and absence of any publishers who publish essential Islamic books
- Assisting print-disabled persons in accessing Islamic literature which is otherwise inaccessible to them
- Other conditions falling within range of fair use and fair deal

Library is committed to complying with laws of the land, encouraging peace and harmony among the broader community of readers, publishers, and the general public. Library strongly opposes all forms of aggression, violence, oppression and terrorism, either done by Muslims or non-Muslims. All users have a responsibility to use the material available through library website in a manner which is consistent with above-mentioned objectives and applicable legal requirements. Also, it is a key 'term of use' to report any inappropriate content to library management along with relevant reasons why certain material was conducted inappropriately.

Library mentions that there may be some content on their website which requires viewer discretion. All material should first be assessed for age and suitability of use requirements before being accessed. Parents are responsible for ensuring that children do not access any material which is not suitable or their age.

Some books and videos are provided to present readers and researchers with a different point of views and diverse thoughts. As mentioned before, a difference of opinion is expected to be dealt in

an appropriate manner. It is re-iterated that books and videos referenced here do not represent our views in their entirety.

No users are allowed to use the material available on library website in ways and manners other than those mentioned in above conditions. Use of the site is NOT permitted for anyone not agreeing with Library's terms and conditions.

What cannot be done with books available on this website?

- Claiming any work to yours when it is not
- Unauthorized publishing
- Using this material for promoting any form of intolerance, violence, racism, discrimination and oppression
- Any other conditions that violate fair-use and fair-dealing conditions

**BENEFITS OF BOOK SCANNING:**

Following section of this paper will review some of the reasons why Australian Islamic Library was established. Library management considers the following to be enough impetus to encourage further digitization of books and requests assistance from book publishers and other volunteers who can assist with this task while remaining within the legal boundaries. We owe this to our Ummah and humanity.

**Assistance for print-disabled readers:**

It is one of the primary objectives of Australian Islamic Library to make Islamic literature available for print-disabled readers on the same lines as HathiTrust - a proven case of legal fair-use (HIGGINS, 2014). Details about HathiTrust will be presented later on in this paper. It is an undeniable fact that there are many readers who struggle to get information from printed media due to vision impairment, inability to physically read books and other related disabilities. Australian Islamic library aims to serve as a useful tool for such print-disabled persons in seeking Islamic knowledge by providing them with copies of Islamic literature online in a format which they adapt to their needs. This enables zooming in and other options to cater for their needs.

Another key feature to assist readers with a disability is 'Read Out Loud' option from servers such as archive.org which can be utilized for numerous files referenced in this library.

**Accessibility of Important Information:**

"The conversion of all sorts of cultural contents into bits and bytes opens up a completely new dimension of reaching traditional and new audiences by providing access to cultural heritage resources in ways unimaginable a decade ago" (HUGHES, 2003, p. 3)

In the present age of the internet, intellectual resources are increasingly globalizing. This presents printed books with a limitation as they are printed and made available ONLY in specific areas in most cases. Muslims are present in all continents and countries, also including those where these books are neither printed nor imported from elsewhere. Book scanning is an initiative to break this barrier and make Islamic knowledge and information accessible to Muslim and non-Muslim users across the globe. If coupled with the acquisition of more than one languages (including a more commonly

spoken languages such as Arabic, English, Spanish or French) and translation movements, it can bring a literary revolution in Muslim Ummah.

Book digitization is particularly beneficial for researchers who can search points of their interest from plain text available with most of the books in digital formats due to OCR features of book-processors such as archive.org. Another group that massively enjoys benefits from this is those interested in writing commentaries. Rather than writing the whole script again with no real benefit in order to write commentary, they now only need to format it and rather than re-inventing the wheel, focussing on their real task, i.e. commentary. It is a value addition for the whole community if we reflect deeply on this.

EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE! And more so, religious knowledge! Specifically Islamic knowledge! And it should not be restricted to only those places where books have been published or distributed.

#### **Preservation:**

“Digitisation contributes to the conservation and preservation of heritage and scientific resources; it creates new educational opportunities” (HUGHES, 2003, p. 6)

Thousands of religious books are being printed across the globe right now. Most of the books that were printed 50 (or less) years back are NOT among them. Books that are printed now will probably NOT be printed in another 50 (or less) years. There are many reasons for this to happen including, but not limited to, declining publishers’ profits in printing certain books, availability of new books on the subject with higher sales potential, destruction of books etc.

“The lifecycle for books is the same: a book is written, it is published, many people buy and enjoy it, the book slowly and quietly disappears and publishers stop printing copies. This happens to exceptional books, average books, and books that perhaps should never have seen the light of day in the first place” (“Zimbabwe,” 2015).

During our golden age and before that, Muslims established dozens of libraries in every single area they went into. Books were the most loved treasure and were acquired from far and wide, collected in houses of wisdom and pondered upon. Where is all that now? Those with a painful heart can still see ashes of our burnt treasures flying in the airs of Baghdad. Those with a corner for this Ummah in their hearts can still see the darkness of ink in the river of Nile and mountain streams of Andalusia. We don’t have anything from that left with us anymore. Could this world be a different place had those books being preserved? What if those books could be digitized then and saved from destruction? Would our Ummah and scholars have happily adopted that option had that been available then? If the sound coming from the corridors of our thought is ‘yes’ then take it as a testimony that digitization of our book and manuscripts is a key factor that will decide our intellectual capacity in coming decades.

It is not the story of 'then' and 'them' only – destruction of books continues to happen even today. Think for a moment about what is happening in the Muslim world in the last few decades. Has situation changed? Has peace been restored, forever? No. In fact, it is extremely unfortunate that wars and bombings, either by extremists or those who use mass-killing weapons against them, are a part of daily life in many countries. We still see libraries being destroyed. In 2003 (Burkeman, 2003),

a number of libraries were destroyed during the war on Iraq. In recent times also, we have seen ISIS extremist looting the libraries in Mosul ("ISIS threat forces Iraq to digitize national library," 2015; Sada, 2015) destroying rich cultural treasures and repeating the same in other areas under their occupation. Though late, but this damage and further threats have finally initiated some digitization efforts:

"In an effort to preserve centuries of the written word from possible pillage by Islamic State militants, the Baghdad National Library is rushing to scan ancient works to create digital archives" ("ISIS threat forces Iraq to digitize national library," 2015). Some of the books being digitized now have transformed into paper rocks due to time and weather effects. Had this not been started even now, much of the precious documents would have been lost forever!

The only way to preserve our precious knowledge and be able to transmit to our next generations is to preserve it through whatever means we can deploy for this purpose. Traditionally memorization has been a method of preserving classical texts. We can seek assistance from memorization of key texts in the present age as well to some extent. BUT, people cannot memorize everything. And not everyone can remember what they memorize once. We undeniably need book digitization.

Even in countries where there is no war, we see many books being printed for a few years before getting disappeared completely as profits from their sale decline (Flanagan, 2014). Do these books become available to public in future after their publication stops? No, unless someone takes an initiative and digitize them. Do they ever become accessible to future generations? No, unless they get digitized. Digitization is our survivor kit. A paper book has a life and its circulation limited. Online resource can be read across the globe, simultaneous as long as that digital source remains. According to an author, "this means our books could be available long after we are" (Wyatt, 2011). Another digitization initiative from Springer goes out with a punch line 'The book will never die' (Harris, 2012) which will most probably be the case based on their digitization efforts. Publishers of Islamic books also have to adopt the same route.

If we do not make these scanned copies available, thousands of religious books would disappear in a few years. Australian Islamic Library is an effort to sustain the noble efforts of our scholars and preserving religious literature without a concern for short-term profit BUT the reward in the hereafter.

#### **Affordability:**

It is quite painful that those who do not have means and financial resources to purchase books cannot access them and remain deprived of significantly important information such as Tafsir, fiqh, history and hadith. We believe that restricting Islamic knowledge to only those who can afford to buy books is one of the highest forms of intellectual and moral transgressions one can do against Islam and Muslim ummah. Australian Islamic Library aims to break this barrier of affordability to enable those with the weaker financial position to be still able to do research on matters related to Islam and use this material in compliance with fair-use conditions. Similarly, those who have resources but not enough aptitude for Islamic literature also need to be given the taste of this beautiful fountain of knowledge. Expecting them to be only able to get it when they buy this literature or expecting them to visit libraries which contain printed versions is not a wise thinking. Similarly, not giving a heed to it and Ignoring the idea of giving them an opportunity and persisting

with financial barriers that need to be crossed before accessing Islamic information is not any wise either. They deserve to be given an opportunity to read Islamic books of their choice which can only be possible if they are made available digitally and without any cost.

One of the management team members of library shares his own experience in this regard. His first exposure to Tafsir and hadith was from an Islamic website, titled 'quranurdu.com' which presented digitized books for readers including famous Tafheem ul Quran and 6 authentic books of hadith. It was from there that his journey took off and he started the pursuit of knowledge. He would have never accessed that at his own initiative by purchasing those books because of his financial condition at that time and his state of Imaan. Now when this library is taking the initiative to spread this beautiful religion and enable furthering of Islamic research, it would be a sadaqa jariya for the initiators of this good which stemmed from their website, inshaAllah.

It is reported by Jarir R.A. that our beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: "Whoever initiates a good practice (sunnah hasanah) in Islam and is emulated by others in doing so will get the reward of it and the reward of all those who act upon it without their rewards being diminished in any respect. And whosoever initiates an evil practice (sunnah sayyi'ah) in Islam and is emulated by others will bear the sin of it and the sin of all those who act on it without their burden being diminished in the least." [Sahîh Muslim: (1017)]

#### PERMISSIBILITY OF DIGITIZATION INITIATIVES:

*Before discussing aspects related to permissibility, it is important to note that Library team shows their commitment that if:*

- *As an author, publisher or reader, someone would like to get a book removed from this library due to certain reasons, it should be communicated to the library through contact form available on the website. Library will directly process and entertain such request from authors and publishers. Requests from readers and the general public will be subject to review by library team.*  
*The experience of library staff has suggested appreciation from authors and their favor for digitizing their works and making them available on readers across the globe.*
- *Library management also firmly believes that books being available online would positively influence higher sales of printed copies rather than impacting sales in a negative way (As a personal example, studying hadith books online encouraged me to purchase hard copies which would never have happened had I not seen the scanned versions). It is reported that e-book readers juggle between paper and electronics (Alter, 2015) and accordingly it can be interpreted that sale of one would positively impact the other.*

Library has not hosted most of the material directly on its server (as it presents contents as links from other servers such as archive.org, which maintain an additional layer of copyright protection) and endeavours to make its best effort to comply with relevant copyright requirements; it is useful to discuss book scanning approach from various angles as DAWAH for publishers and other relevant stakeholders.

#### 1. LOGICAL GROUNDS

Just imagine for a moment if Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, Companions or great scholars of Islam would have put copyrights on their stuff so that no-one can use their work without permission. What if they would tell that it is a profit based matter and 'a percentage of it' would also be used for increasing the good work? We don't expect it from them, the most noble people to walk on this earth, and they never did that. Neither did our pious predecessor who never asked 'payment' for their efforts. The only thing that concerned them was 'as-is' production to avoid forgery in the noble message. Do you think such extensive research, innovations and inventions could have been possible with price barriers! How could information move from one area to the other when there were no electronic copies available? It was done through book copying authenticated and endorsed by scholars for further transmission. Books were transferred through camels, sometimes 120 of them at a time, laden with thousands of books on their backs traveling for months. But in 2015, we don't need that. This means of communication to enable research and Islamic scholarship now is through the internet – reproducing copies 'as-is' without changes and making them available to those who need them to quench their thirst from what these books contain in them. To me, it makes perfect sense to make essential Islamic literature available in electronic form accessible across the globe. This also aligns with intentions of our salaf like Imam Malik, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Ahmed, Imam Shafii, Imam Bukhari, Imam Muslim, Imam Ibn e Kathir and others who spent all their lives to spread the words of wisdom and their works to benefit the humanity. Why should that be restricted what the original authors never intended to restrict!

*It is that of which Allah gives good tidings to His servants who believe and do righteous deeds. Say, "I do not ask you for this message any payment [but] only good will through kinship." And whoever commits a good deed - We will increase for him good therein. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Appreciative. (Quran 42:13)*

Secondly, some people who support and advocate copyright of religious material claim that it is required for publishers to keep printing the books. I respectfully disagree with that. Copyright should be used as a means to protect the original work and its ownership rather than restricting public access to knowledge for financial purposes. It is highly unfortunate that sale of most Islamic books today are done on 'FOR PROFIT' basis though some publishers claim that they pay to authors and use it in the expansion of their efforts. I seriously respect this intention but have a few reservations:

- I struggle to understand how can they pay Imam Bukhari, Imam Muslim, Imam Ahmad, Imam shafi'i, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Sufyan Thauri, Imam Ibn e Kathir, Imam Malik, Qutub Shaheed, Syed Suleman Nadvi, Maulana Maududi and others! If they don't pay them then why are their books not made available to public at cost price or free? That too when the original authors never copyrighted their work!
- If expansion and propagation of Islam depends on copywriting books and money-making in selling them, Islamic knowledge would have already been long lost as there were no copyrights till 1923!
- In our opinion, copyrighting Islamic work, creates a monopoly and restrict access to Islamic knowledge.

Today we see works of Ibne Kathir, for example, published by a number of different publishers because the original work did not have any copyright. Had there been publishers in his time with

whom he would have locked in copyright agreements and contracts not allowing others to publish his work, his work would have been rarely available today as one publisher cannot operate forever and hard copies have a certain life. Reviewing present day situation in the light of this example clarifies following points very abundantly:

- Works of present day scholars can be in serious jeopardy a few decades down the lane when certain publishers cease to exist or lose interest in certain works (due to their lower or no financial gains in those times) unless these books get digitized and preserved
- These works should be made available publicly if their life is to be extended (which is an essential consideration when it comes to Islamic knowledge, more than any other branch of knowledge) so that they network around and keep benefitting other people.

## 2. LEGAL GROUNDS

Most countries have copyright laws with provisions for fair-use and fair-dealing which allows following and similar uses.

- *Research and study*
- Review and criticism
- Reporting the news
- Legal advice
- Parody and Satire
- Commentary,
- Search engines,
- *Teaching,*
- *Library archiving*
- Scholarship etc.

Following are some famous courts cases related to copyright issues that arise due to online content sharing (mainly books):

- In August 2008, US District Judge Jeremy Fogel of San Jose, California ruled that copyright holders cannot order a deletion of an online file without determining whether that posting reflected "fair use" of the copyrighted material (Kravets, 2008).
- In November 2013, U.S. Circuit Judge Denny Chin in Manhattan accepted Google's argument that its scanning of more than 20 million books (Clark & Voris, 2015), and making "snippets" of text available online, constituted "fair use" under U.S. copyright law. The decision would let Google continue expanding the library, which it said helps readers find books they might not otherwise locate. James Grimmelman, a University of Maryland intellectual property law professor said: "It is also a good ruling for libraries and researchers because the opinion recognizes the public benefit of making books available," (STEMPEL, 2013). **It was also discussed in court that this has a potential to increase sales rather than reducing it.**
- In a decision that is likely to help shape the future of online fair use, a federal court in New York concluded that digitizing books in order to enhance research and to provide access to print-

disabled individuals are lawful - *The Authors Guild, Inc. v. HathiTrust* (BARCLAY & MCSHERRY, 2012). But what is perhaps most refreshing is that the court paid close attention to the public interest in the project, recognizing that it actually served the purposes of copyright: to promote the progress of science and the useful arts. Citing a brief filed by EFF and several library associations, the court recognized that the HathiTrust projects efforts helped, rather than hindered, access to creative works. That public benefit, the court said, meant that the HDL supported "the underlying rationale of copyright law". ALRC (Australia) mentions following on its website regarding fair use and HathiTrust Case while discussing the issue for libraries and archives. We have highlighted the point that are completely in line with objectives of our library.

"

12.30 Fair use is expected to cover uses that are not covered by specific exceptions relating to preservation and document supply, discussed below. This section briefly highlights how fair use might apply in relation to certain uses made by cultural institutions.

"

Also,

"

12.31 Fair use may allow cultural institutions to undertake mass digitisation projects in some instances. For example, in *Authors Guild v Hathi Trust*, the District Court for the Southern District of New York found that the defendant's mass digitisation of works in its collections to allow its members to conduct full-text searches across the entire collection and to allow print-disabled patrons to access the collection to be fair use. The use of copyright material was found to be transformative in that it provided access for print-disabled individuals, a purpose that was not served by the original work. The provision of access for print-disabled individuals did not have a significant impact on a market.

"

And

"

12.32 In the ALRC's view, mass digitisation projects are more likely to be fair use where they facilitate research and study, are transformative in nature, use the material in the public domain, or are undertaken for non-commercial reasons.

" (ALRC, 2013)

Figure 1 is a snapshot from HathiTrust website demonstrating their method of allowing full-text readable books (similar to archive.org which is heavily hyperlinked in our website).

Note: HathiTrust partner libraries/ institutes have shared their digitized contents to pool into this repository. List of partners can be reviewed at:

<http://www.hathitrust.org/community> (as on 7-Nov-15)

In accordance with above, Library considers providing digitized books (through hyperlinks) for educational and research purposes (hosted at servers and websites maintaining copyright check systems as an additional layer of protection) on non-profit basis (zero cost to researchers, students,

and educators) to be fair use. Also, according to decisions made by courts digitization of books is not an infringement (BARCLAY & MCSHERRY, 2012) and hyperlinking does not infringe copyrights (Shaw et al., 2014). However, if any publisher still disagrees with this, library would consider their requests and respond, either by removing links to their books or by seeking more information regarding why they believe that the library is not using this material in accordance with fair-use and fair-dealing principles (as they are required to determine about Library's fair use before requesting deletion according to 2008 case cited above)

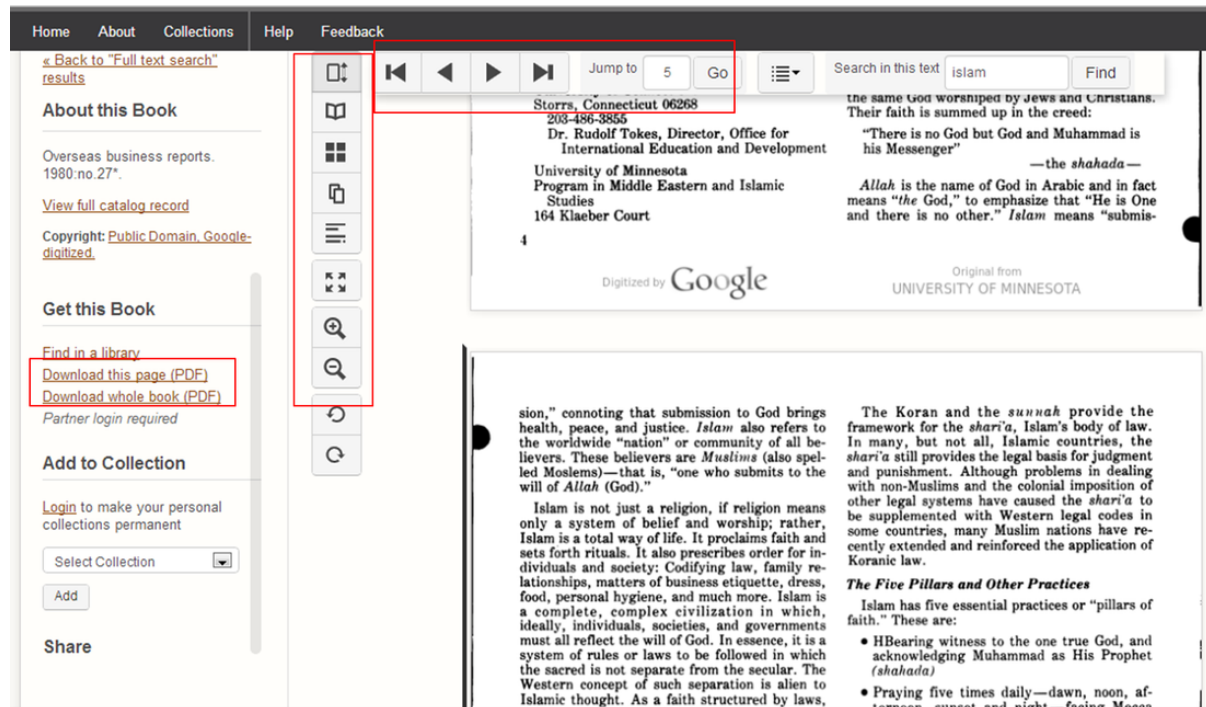


Figure 1: A screenshot from Hathitrust website

### 3. RELIGIOUS GROUNDS:

Numerous scholars have given fatawa about permissibly of using Islamic material (even under copyright protection) for non-monetary purpose and for dawah. **This permission is not applicable to anything other than Islamic material e.g. books, lectures etc.**

In a fatwa from Jamia Islamia Binori Town Karachi, Pakistan, a questioner presented the same scenario as we have described before (i.e. charging high amounts for Islamic books and not allowing that to be copied, especially in West where costs are manifolds higher than the actual cost price). In response, Maulana Habib ullah Mukhtar gave a comprehensive response quoting various opinions and establishing that though charging minimal expenses may be permissible, charging massive amounts and reserving rights for further transmission and reproduction is not permissible (Mukhtar, 2006). This clearly demonstrates that putting copyrights on religious material and charging hefty amounts is restricting propagation of knowledge and noble religion of Islam.

There is a fatwa from Sheikh Bin Baaz (Saudi Arabia) also which allows the use of Islamic material for non-monetary purposes (Musharraf, 2015).

Shaikh Yousaf Estes in one of his talk (Musharraf, 2015) mentioned his encouragement towards copying and distributing religious material. One of his statements was that “We are not trying to make money out of selling our religion”. He also stated, “I think it is people in some other religions who do that”. We interpret from this that if we also start doing the same or continue to do the same, we will be imitating those who do not believe and sell their religion for worldly gains.

*...“Do not trade away My revelations for a cheap price, and observe Me”. (Quran 2:41)*

*“And there are certainly among the people of the Book those who believe in Allah in the revelation to you and in the revelation to them bowing in humility to Allah: they will not sell the signs of Allah for a miserable gain! for them is a reward with their Lord and Allah is swift in account.” (Quran 3:199)*

Another scholar Sheikh Feiz has mentioned his opinion (Musharraf, 2015) that Islamic work should not be restricted with copyrights and distributed to all those who need it.

Following are some points highlighted from reliablefatwas.com – a website that presents articles, fatawa and responses from Maulana Ahmad Sadeq Desai (“About,” 2013) unless stated otherwise on an article or fatwa:

Copyright in the Light of the Shariah (Desai, 2014a):

- Although this issue is simple, not requiring any academic discussion to dispose of its baatil, some modern-day scholars who have embraced liberalism have introduced unnecessary complications of deception by their presentation of arguments with a Shar’i hue, but devoid of Shar’i substance. Their fallacious interpretations and citation of certain ahkaam out of context to accord validity to copyright –that it is a Shar’i right which is a valid subject of trade- have resulted in creating confusion in the minds of people not well-versed with the intricacies of the principles and rules of the Shariah. There has, therefore, developed the need for this refutation to dispel the haze of deception which the liberalists have created with their spurious arguments.
- The issue of copyright in the light of the Shariah is extremely straightforward and simple. It is a miserable concept which has absolutely no validity in the Shariah. It is not maal (tangible or physical commodity) which could be tradable in terms of the laws of Islam. Dealing in this imagined ‘right’ is baatil—null, void and haraam. Just as it is haraam to prevent a man from reading a book which he has bought, so is it haraam to prevent him from copying the book by whatever means he chooses. Just as it is haraam to prevent a man from selling a book which he has bought, so too is it haraam to prevent him from printing the book which belongs to him regardless of who the author is.
- This action “forms a barrier between Allah’s Deen and His servants”.

While analyzing the arguments of those who advocate copyright of Islamic material, fatwa also mentions (Desai, 2014b):

- Regardless of whether Deeni books are published in this age for altruistic Deeni aims or for monetary gain, this is no grounds for claiming Shar’i validity and permissibility for the

concept of copyright. On the assumption that all Deeni books in this age are published for only monetary gain and for no other altruistic aim, then too, this is not a Shar'i basis for the validity of the copyright and to trade in it. The Shariah categorically prohibits the selling of even valid rights which it recognizes. So, whether books are printed and published for Deeni reasons or pecuniary gain or whether exclusively for pecuniary gain without even the intention of thawaab, then too, this does not constitute Shar'i grounds for the validity of copyright and for permissibility to trade in such imagined right.

- Some advocates of copyrights claim: "In the absence of copyright the author suffers monetary loss". Mufti Desai answers this question in a lot of detail establishing the point that "future loss of imaginary or expected earnings" is not recognized by the Shariah". The Shariah simply does not regard deprivation of future benefit as a monetary loss. In Shariah, a true loss will be the loss of tangible commodity (money or material commodities) which is already in one's possession. An opinion from Mufti Muhammad Shafi is quoted: "This is not dharar (a harm or actual loss). It is the non-existence of a benefit, in fact, a decrease in benefit. The difference between dharar and 'adamun nafa' (non-existence of benefit) is quite apparent..... if one's (lawful) activity leads to a decrease in the profit of others, then one's activity remains lawful. If in the marketplace there are a number of shops trading in the same commodities, and this results in the decrease of any trader's profit or in the total deprivation of profit, it will not be said that the other traders are responsible for causing him loss. Hence, there is neither Shar'i nor rational grounds for preventing the traders from trading (in that area)."
- Advocates of copyright on Islamic material also claim: "According to the Shariah if Maslihat does not conflict with Nass, then its adoption is permissible." According to them copyright is not in conflict with any law of the Shariah, hence it is permissible. Mufti Desai mentions that this claim is likewise baseless. To support this argument, he refers to earlier discussion during the fatwa which establishes:
  - o Copyright infringes on the natural and lawful right (Haqq-e- Mubah) of others besides the author—their right to utilize their own property to earn a lawful profit.
  - o Copyright prevents the free and mass distribution of beneficial Deeni kitaabs.
  - o Copyright is exploitation since it fosters haraam monopolies and it allows the author to fix exorbitant prices.
  - o Copyright allows the greed of an individual to cause detriment to the masses.
  - o Copyright allows monetary dealing in an entity which is not maal (tangible or physical commodity). This is haraam. The prohibition of selling rights applies to a greater degree to an imaginary right – a right which does not exist in the Shariah.

All these acts are in conflict with Nass. The conspicuity of the conflict with Nass does not require the production of evidence as the conflict is obvious.

In addition to above opinions and points, library's management has also sought the opinion of two prominent Australian Muslim scholars who consider upload of Islamic material for dawah purposes as permissible. It was considered preferable to give a few years period before uploading a book so that publisher can make a good profit during that time.

## CONCLUSION:

In this paper, we have reviewed the operating model of Australian Islamic Library and its key objectives. We also presented a comprehensive review of logical, legal and religious aspects related to digitization of Islamic books and established the point of its permissibility in terms of relevant legislation and rulings from Islamic scholars. It was concluded that digitization of Islamic books is an essential requirement in terms of preserving important Islamic literature and passing it on to next generation who can build further on this and extend scholarly efforts to next level.

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## APPENDIX 1

This appendix further explains the points highlighted in paper:

### WHAT LANGUAGES TO INCLUDE IN CURRICULUM FOR MUSLIM CHILDREN (Pg 6-13)

(Revised on 30-Nov-15)

#### Background:

The paper recommends four languages for educators and curriculum designers to facilitate their students acquire maximum global outreach with language abilities.

Languages recommended by paper are:

[Arabic] – [English] – [A Local Language] – [Spanish OR French]

Following graphic representation<sup>1</sup> clarifies the point further:

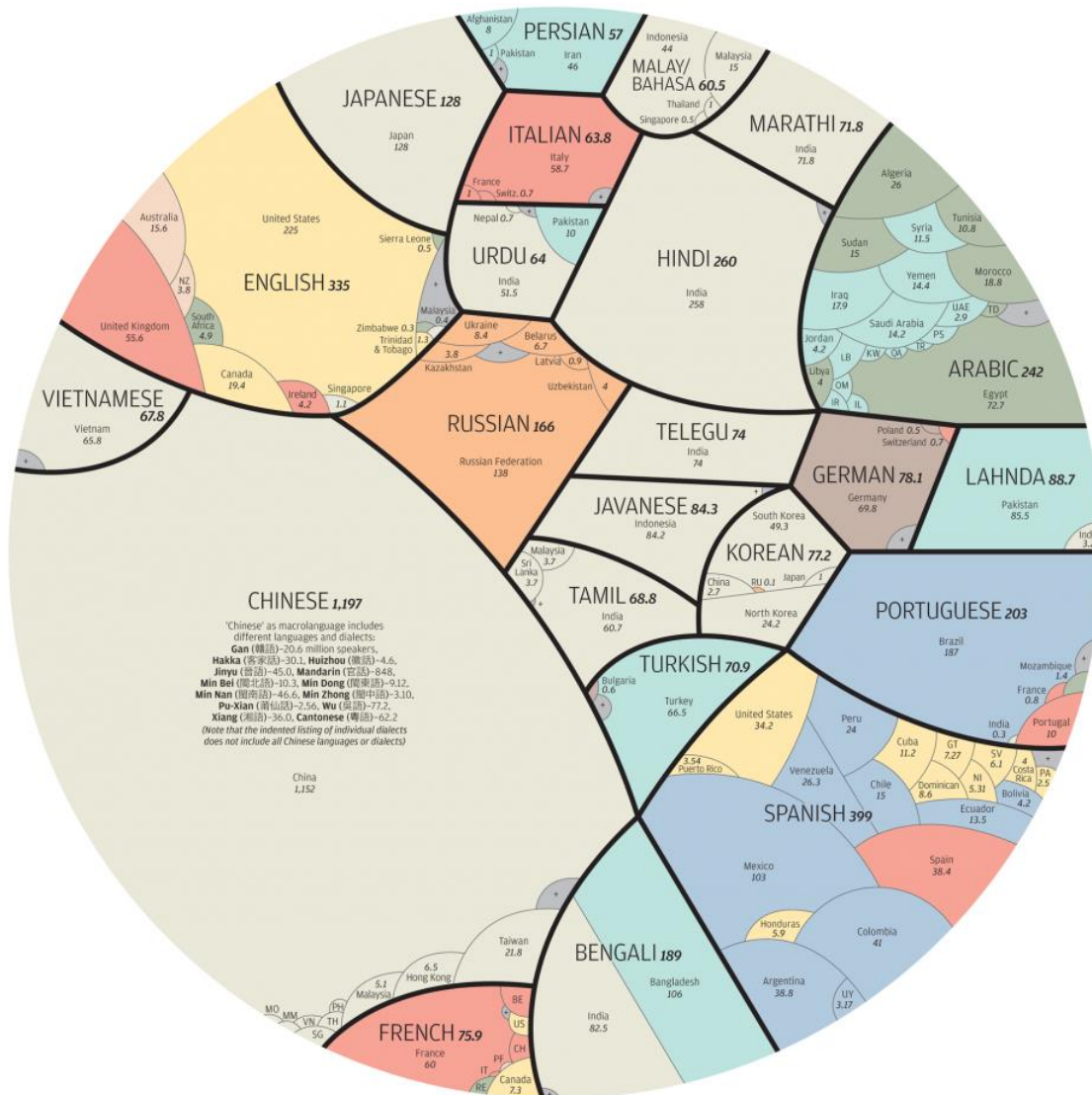


Figure 1 Languages Around the globe

<sup>1</sup> It is adopted from graphics presented by (López, 2015)

From the chart, we see that Chinese has the highest number of speakers. But they are all mainly concentrated in China with small followings in other countries. It would accordingly be considered a local language and can be included in proposed 4 language model as such. It can also be included in the curriculum if required for communication with people within China for certain reasons, such as missionary activities, education or other purposes. Seeing this with analysis presented by Pegg (2012) further clarifies the argument above:



Figure 2 Concentration of Mandarin Language

Same is the case with Russian which is also concentrated in one connected geographical location.



Figure 3 Concentration of Russian Language

On the other hand, we see that our recommended languages English, Arabic, Spanish / French (in combination with a local language) are spread across a number of geographical locations which can ensure better geographical outreach. This point is further explained by following graph (Weber, 1999) which shows that by learning the first four languages in the chart below, one can have maximum global outreach.

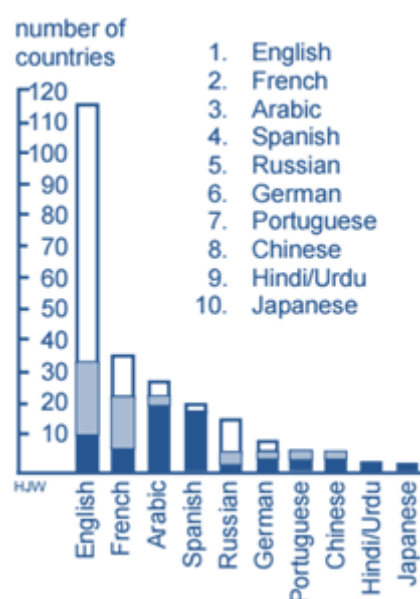


Figure 4 Language and Number of Countries they are spoken in

Further to this, it was already established in the paper that the English is considered to be the language in which message can most easily get across the globe (with reference to study conducted at MIT).

To strengthen this point further, following graphics (López, 2015) show the number of people learning The English language is considerably higher than other languages.

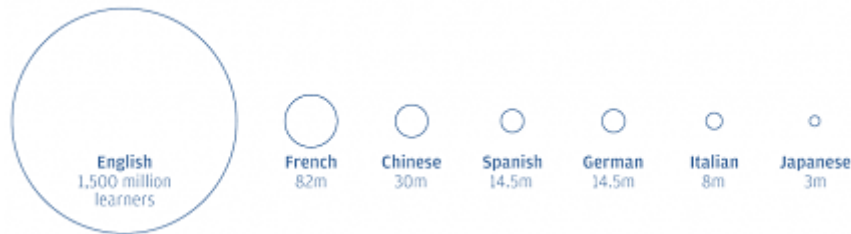


Figure 5 Language Learners across the globe

Same figures were also presented by Noack & Gamio (2015) using graphics which make this comparison even clearer:

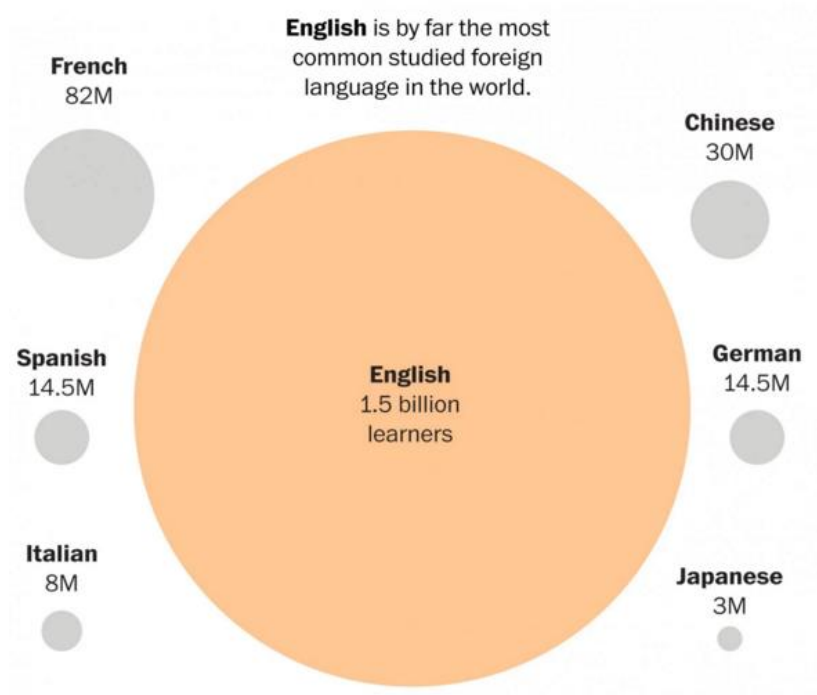


Figure 5 Language Learners across the globe (Washington Post)

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