

Integrated Education: A Study on the Islamic Educational Thought of Mohammad Natsir

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Abstract: This study discusses Mohammad Natsir's concept of integrated education from the Qur'anic perspective. Natsir was concerned with the need to develop the Muslim *ummah* in Indonesia through educational approaches. He disagreed with the system of Islamic education as represented within Islamic boarding schools known as *pesantren*, arguing that graduates from such institutions were not equipped with worldly knowledge to maintain their survival and contribute to the development of the *ummah* in the real world. He equally criticized graduates of Western education for being highly motivated by material interests. The purpose of education, according to Natsir, cannot be separated from the mission of life in this world: that is to promote justice and to eradicate evil practices in the community. Natsir disagreed with the division of knowledge into Eastern and the Western, asserting that both realms of knowledge belong to God. The study attempts to discuss the relevance of his educational thought today as a contribution to the concept of Islamization of knowledge.

Keywords: education, development, *ummah*, justice, Islamization of education

Introduction: Natsir's Life

Mohammad Natsir was born in West Sumatra on 17 July, 1908. He studied in a Dutch school for three years and lived with the family of

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a businessman whose son was his classmate. That person contributed considerably in shaping Natsir's religious thoughts by facilitating him to study the Qur'an and Arabic language (Nata, 2004, p.75). During his childhood, Natsir was already acquainted with reformist thoughts through Engku Mudo Amin, his religious studies teacher who belonged to the *Muhammadiyah* organization and the founder of *al-Tawalib* Islamic educational institution (Kahin, 1995, p.51).

In 1923, Natsir completed *Holands Inlandse School* [(HIS) (elementary school)] and also *madrasah* education which he attended in the afternoon. He then enrolled into Padang *Meer Uitgerbreid Lager Onderwijs: Mulo* (Junior High School) with a scholarship from the Dutch colonial government (Harjono, 1995, p.52).

In July 1927, he joined the *Algemene Middlebare School: AMS* (Senior High School) in Bandung (Harjono, 1995, p.11) where he studied classical Western literature and Greek civilization. Natsir was involved in the *Jong Islamiten Bond* where he got the chance to meet Ahmad Hassan (1887-1958),^c a Muslim reformist with *Wahabi* influence (Noer, 1973, pp.86-87). He was fascinated by the latter scholar's vast knowledge, simplicity, sharpness of analysis and boldness in presenting his ideas (Puar, 1978, p.17). Ahmad taught him the Arabic language in depth and even donated to him a *tafsir* book in English written by Muhammad Yusuf Ali (Natsir, 1998, p.12).

He completed his education in 1930 with distinction thereby earning a scholarship to study law in Holland. However, Natsir decided not to take it up, and instead opted to study religion (Kahin, 1995, p.53 and Nata, 2004, p.76). He was very fond of reading and most of the materials he read were related to the reformist thoughts of Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida (Abaza, 1994, pp.52-54).

During the Japanese occupation, Natsir served as Chief of the Bureau of Islamic education in Bandung. Shortly after Independence,

c He was acknowledged by many in Indonesia as a great scholar and a tireless advocate of the need for renewal (*tajdid*) and reform (*islah*)- see Hallaq, Wael B (1997), *Ahmad Hassan and Islamic Legal Reform in Indonesia (1887-1958)*.

Sukarno appointed him to become Minister of Information in the first cabinet of Indonesia (Puar, 1978, p.79 and Irsyam, 1984, p.31). In 1952, Natsir was invited by the Senate of Pakistan to deliver a speech on international affairs. His presence in Pakistan caused Arab governments, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Turkey as well as India and Burma to invite him to benefit from his ideas related to the establishment of peace and justice.

In 1956, he visited Damascus to attend a conference organized by World Muslim Congress on the issue of Palestine. In 1957, the President of Tunisia gave him the award *Nichan Istikhar* due to his support towards the independence struggle of the People of North Africa. In 1967, he went to Jordan to attend a conference organized by the Muslim Brethren in which he was appointed as chief delegate to meet the Arab leaders of Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In 1980, the King Faisal Foundation gave him an award for his services to Islam and the Muslim *ummah*. In 1991, the Islamic University of Lebanon conferred upon him an honorary doctorate degree. Likewise, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) granted him an honorary doctorate degree in Islamic Thought.

Natsir's View on Western Education

Discussing the views of Natsir on Western education cannot be done without looking into his statements on the educational system during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia. Natsir was mainly dissatisfied with the Western education system (i.e. Dutch education) which only offered secular subjects. Despite that, Natsir endorsed the preservation of secular subjects available in the Dutch educational institutions such as psychology, sociology and even Western philosophical thought (Saydam, 2008, p.185). He agreed that the things emphasized by the Dutch education system could only produce graduates who are against the Islamic cultural system.

Natsir did not bother with the so-called Western education. According to him, the goodness of education cannot be judged through its geographical location. It lies in the use of knowledge to promote justice and betterment of life. We found such views when he resolved the problem of the rivalry between those who were educated in the West and those educated in the East (Muslim countries).

Those who were educated in Western universities felt superior compared to those who were educated in the East (Muslim countries). Likewise, the graduates of Middle East universities regarded those who were educated in Western universities as agents of unbelievers considering that in many cases they promoted modernism which could negatively affect the basic principles of the Muslim faith. Natsir took a moderate stand and tried to bridge the gap between the two groups, arguing that knowledge should be evaluated based on the divine value system without undermining its sources. He argued that both the East and the West belong to God: the knowledge and science which come from Western sources contain both negative and positive aspects. Natsir regarded these two blocks (East and West) as competing in producing human civilization but they were also complimenting each other. As such, there was no point in antagonizing Western education as long as it could be used to serve justice and goodness (Natsir, 2008, p.92 and Mahendra, 1999, pp.264-265).

Those who refused Western education, he said, did not have broad intellectualism. The religion of Islam is only concerned with the contradiction between the truth (*al-haqq*) and the false (*al-batil*). This perspective demonstrates Natsir's broad understanding of the universal values that Islam promotes. He held that truth and justice should be supported although they come from non-Muslims, while falsehood (*al-batil*) and injustice should be discarded despite them coming from the Muslim world (Natsir, 2008, p.81).

Natsir praised the effectiveness of Western education in training youths to master technological knowledge and explore the development of all things in the universe from which humans can benefit. According to him, Muslims cannot reject the western system simply because of the obvious Western faults, such as materialism and primarily reliance upon faculties of reason. The Muslim world should adopt the system of promotion of individual abilities and intellectual freedoms, while at the same time maintaining its focus on spiritual and moral values of Islam, while not neglecting the importance of secular knowledge (Natsir, 2008, p.82).

Thus the concept of knowledge which comes from the Western sources should not necessarily be rejected as Islam encourages its followers to cross-check the concept of truth regardless of cultural

and religious boundaries they are in. For his argument on the support for Western knowledge, Natsir referred to the previous experiences of Muslim scholars and scientists who thoroughly studied the philosophies and other theories of sciences developed by scholars such as Plato, Socrates and Ptolemy. Later, they made commentaries and analytical studies, eventually producing their original works which were beneficial at the global level. During the golden period, Muslim scholars exerted their energies and thoughts to come up with new inventions in various fields (Natsir, 2008, p.93).

Natsir realized that there existed a rivalry between Eastern (Islamic) and Western models of education. On the one hand, Islam was linked to Eastern education while the West was viewed as going against the Islamic value system. It was believed that Western education brings with it certain consequences which contradict Islamic teachings. Now, what is the position of Islam regarding this apparent contradiction? Is it true that Islam is opposed to Western education? These are some of the questions Natsir dealt with.

His main reasoning was that, Islam strongly encourages its adherents to think critically and prohibits taking other people's ideas blindly. Such guidance, he held, could be summed up from the following textual evidence:

And surely, many do lead (mankind) astray by their own desires through lack of knowledge". (Qur'an, 6: 115) and:
 "They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. (Qur'an, 4: 157)

Islam and Western Civilization

Considering that education produces 'human civilization', we shall now discuss how Natsir handled the civilizational role of Western education. Our analysis of Natsir's works did not reveal any see his clear-cut view regarding the concept of civilization. He tended to believe that Islam is the source of civilization and culture, and all other positive outcome of human activities. He commented on the views of H.A.R. Gibb, a Dutch intellectual figure, who told that: 'Islam is indeed much more than system of theology and it is complete civilization' (Gibb, 1986, p.17).

On the basis of the above statement, given by a non-Muslim intellectual who admits to the supremacy and comprehensiveness of Divine guidance, Natsir argued that it is imperative on every individual Muslim to broaden the religious insights in which areas of teaching should go beyond the sphere of spirituality rather than be regarded at the same time as the main impetus to make progress and create civilization. Apart from the powerful message which became the main source of creativity and civilization, Natsir also gave analytical assumptions on the emergence of the cradle of human civilization in the Muslim world, following the arrival of the Divine messages given to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh):

History has shown us that each nation which experienced the test with pain and hardship of life and continuously struggled without frustration throughout hundreds of years, one day will reach the civilizational stage that could enlighten other nations. One day they will inherit the fruit of happiness to other nations which come afterward (Natsir, 1936, p.2).

He was of the view that progress and enlightenment have moved from one place to another regardless of geographical boundaries. For Muslims, Islam is the determinant of the form of civilization. The supremacy of Islam is due to the spirit of the message which envisages the guidelines to create civilization. Any civilization that gives benefits to others deserves the praise. Islam appreciates the intellectualism (*aql*) which should be utilized in a proper way for studying the universe. Secondly, the message of Islam emphasizes the importance of knowledge and obliges its followers to pursue it. A large percentage of message of the Quran and Hadith is related to knowledge. Reason and the study of the universe are used to prove the compatibility between textual evidence and the outcomes of learning. Thus Natsir argues that seeking knowledge should not end to a certain limit or degree; rather, it will continue up to the last sojourn into the eternal journey as mentioned by the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) who said, '*Seek the knowledge starting from the cradle up to the graveyard*' (al-Quzwayni, n.d, p.81).

Moreover, Islam encourages its followers to think critically and forbids them from blind imitation of other people's vision as they come

up with a new model of civilization. Such guidance, is based on the teachings of the Quran which says,

And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge. Verily, the hearing, and the sight, and the heart of those ones will be questioned (by Allah) (Qur'an, 17: 36).

Furthermore, it obliges its believers to make a journey at least once in the lifetime to where they could witness different ethics and races of humankind. He quotes the verse of the Qur'an which enjoins Muslims to perform the pilgrimage to Makkah. Apart from the fulfilment of the religious task, it also gives them a chance to meet others who come from different parts of the world. Through that meeting, he claimed, they could have inter-cultural contacts which are essential for the progress of civilization (Natsir, 1936, pp. 4-5).

To illustrate the significance of intercultural contract, he pointed out the initiatives made by Muslim caliphs in Baghdad for the rise of Islamic civilization. If Makkah was known as the center of spiritual activities, then Baghdad used to be the center of civilizational excellence. Natsir held that spirituality and intellectualism should go hand in hand to play a role for the progress of the Muslim *ummah* (Natsir, 2008, p. 7). Muslim caliphs such as al-Ma'mun and Harun al-Rashid took bold policies to encourage Muslim scholars and scientists to expose their ideas through scientific findings and even to benefit from other people's sources. They were not reluctant to negate falsehood after thorough study even though it came from their own circles (Natsir, 2008, p.8). This attitude is significant as it relates to the development of Islamic education.

Islamic Education

Now we turn to the concept of Islamic education in the hands of Natsir aimed at producing graduates with balanced spiritual and physical aspects. Natsir was among the rare Muslim intellectuals who had the vision that the development of the *ummah* can only be achieved through proper planning of education. In the 1930s, he tried to actualize his ideas by running a private educational institution. Concerned that the quality of education can only be achieved with the use of proper syllabus and pedagogy, he sought to apply a comprehensive methodology that could

produce students who are well-equipped with religious values and worldly knowledge (Puar, 1978, p.31).

If we link the idea of integrating knowledge with religion, Natsir was, at that time, simply keen to maintain the sciences as offered in the Dutch (Western) educational system but adding religious subjects to the system to equip students with the mission of dedicating their knowledge to gain God's pleasure. However, religious subjects must be instilled in the minds of the youths with the use of analysis to avoid 'blind imitation'.

Apparently, his idea of serving the *ummah* through education could be linked to the reformatist thoughts of Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh (Noer, 1973, p.53). Natsir was concerned about the comprehensiveness of the *Shari'ah* which had to be taught to the youths. He felt that the model of Western education, which merely focused on the material aspect, would only cause the emergence of alien ideas that contradicted the Divine message. He took efforts to remedy the malaise of religious education provided in traditional boarding schools which only produced graduates with religious knowledge but lacked skills to respond to the reality of life (Noer, 1973, p.89).

The model of education proposed by Natsir was quite similar to the system developed by the *Muhamadiyah* organization which offered both secular and religious subjects simultaneously. The difference lay in the practical aspect: apart from the obligation to attend Friday congregation on the premise, for instance, students were taught music and drama. Moreover, there were certain subjects which were not offered in other institutions such as agriculture to train students to cultivate the lands (Natsir, 2008, pp.3-4).

It is quite obvious that the idea of Islamic education in the hands of Natsir was intended to save future generations from secular influence (Abaza, 1994, p.44). His concept of education was elucidated in keynote address given during the conference organized by *Persatuan Islam* (Muslim Unity) in the 1930s (Natsir, 2008, p.80). He emphasized that education is the cornerstone of a building to determine the progress of the nation. He gave the example of Japan as one of the countries in the East which had achieved good progress in the field of science and technology and attracted people from all over the world simply because

its leaders focused their attention seriously to educating the youths (Natsir, 2008, p. 80).

Natsir's idea of a new model of education was partially a response to the call of *ijtihad* as viewed by his mentor, Ahmad Hassan, who encouraged the use of critical thinking in seeking solutions to socio-economic, educational and political problems from the religious perspectives (Abaza, 1993, p.67). Education was one of the elements used by Natsir in producing a new system to create religious commitment to the whole gamut of human activities. Ahmad Hasan's statement that *ijtihad* needs to be emphasized among all members of *Persatuan Islam* that he founded, was instrumental in stimulating Natsir's views on education. He held that:

Persatuan Islam insisted that the gate of *ijtihad* remains open. However, it should be undertaken only by those trained in this science of religious investigation. A *mujtahid* must know Arabic and its sciences such as '*ilm al-tafsir*', '*ilm al-usul*', '*ilmmuamalat al-Hadith* sufficiently for understanding the meaning and intention of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. (Abaza, 1994, p.53)

His idea of religious education reflects his intellectual maturity after he received guidance from Ahmad Hassan from whom, towards the end, Natsir came up with a comprehensive understanding that the message given to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) must be taken as a source of guidance for socio-economic, education and even political developments. Natsir was of the view that integrated education should start from pre-university levels. He wanted to eliminate the negative image of Islamic education as represented in traditional Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, known as *pesantren*. He combined secular and religious subjects into a single entity which was used to produce graduates with a balance of intelligence and faithful commitment. As such, his educational institute maintained secular subjects such as psychology, sociology and even Western philosophical thought as pointed out earlier (Saydam, 2008, p. 185).

With regard to religious subjects, Natsir encouraged the use of analytical thinking instead of memorizing the Qur'anic texts. Students were also taught about playing the piano to get rid of monotony and they

were also obliged to compose songs which they performed at an annual drama and musical performance (Puar, 1998, p.122). Such emphasis attempted to demonstrate a new model of education which could produce graduates who were well-motivated by religious morality and competent in worldly sciences. To him, education was the main factor to assure the progress of the nation. Hence, it should be taken as the main priority in the policy of the government. He referred to the Qur'anic verses which he regarded as the main source of guidance for the nation to achieve progress through education. The verse says:

Many were the ways of life that have passed away before you: travel though the earth, and see what the end of those who rejected truth was. Here is plain statement to men, a guidance and instruction to those who fear Allah! (Qur'an, 3:137-138).

This demonstrates that Natsir was a moderate Muslim intellectual who had the broad vision on education to make the progress in the Muslim *ummah*. Both secular and religious knowledge need to be instilled in the minds of the youths so that, in the long run, they could contribute in developing the *ummah* (Natsir, 2008, p.78).

Regarding the outcomes of Islamic education, Natsir expected it to produce new generations with high quality and competency as experienced by previous Muslim generations during the golden age of Islam. The key characters possessed by those during the golden era were firmness and steadfastness in their efforts. They combined the worldly life with the hereafter. Likewise, they had high spirits in pursuing knowledge and doing spiritual activities (Natsir, 2008, p.79). His views on the goal of Islamic education were quite similar to the motto of the International Islamic University Malaysia^d which is to revive the *ummah* by restoring education in all branches of knowledge and sciences.

^d IIUM vision and mission – to become a leading international centre of educational excellence which seeks to restore the dynamic and progressive role of the Muslim Ummah in all branches of knowledge and intellectual discourse through Integration, Islamization, Internationalization and Comprehensive Excellence from www.iium.edu.my/about-iium/iium-vision

He strongly emphasized that the nation will not achieve prosperity unless the government takes the responsibility of properly planning and developing education at all levels. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was sent by God to give guidance which included the philosophy of education. His view was apparently motivated by the command of the Quran which says:

Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. And it is they who are successful". (Qur'an, 3:104)

The concept of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (promoting goodness and eradicating evil) includes providing education to the community. This could be regarded as the other side of a distinctive scholarship approach. In most cases, interpreters simply regard that the above mentioned verse as being related solely to the work of *da'wah* in the community. Education in the eyes of Natsir was integrated with *da'wah*.

Objective of Islamic Education

For Natsir, the main objective of education in Islam is to serve Allah. Education should not be disconnected from the concept of *tawhid* which represents the bedrock of Islam. It is the source of freedom and spiritual power to attain progress and happiness, both in this world and in the hereafter (Naim, 1995, pp.78-79). Natsir described that the purpose of education is to produce generations who will dedicate their lives for the cause of Allah, as emphasized in the Qur'anic verse that says,

But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion of lawful enjoyment in this world; and do good as Allah has been good to you, and seek not mischief in the land (Qur'an, 28: 77).

This tawhidic view call for education to serve community interests as well. For Natsir, "education is not to create a person who is competent in his field for his own sake rather it should be catered to serve the needs of people in the community" (Natsir, 2008, p.81). In this particular aspect,

education is closely related to the commitment of a person to dedicate his life to an ideal and cooperate with others.

The goal of education, in reality, cannot be separated from the objectives of life. Natsir's definition of education whereby he held that: 'it is physical and spiritual leadership which will lead to the perfection and completeness of human characters in the real sense' (Natsir, 2008, p.82 and Langgulong, 2005, p.135). Thus, education in Islam should comply with the real objectives of life or become fruitless. Ultimately, the objective of education should be in response to the Divine call which says, "*I have only created Jinns and men that they may serve Me*" (Qur'an, 51: 56).

The word '*ibadah* (lit. worship), according to Natsir, refers to obeying all of the commands given by God, leading to great achievements in this world and in the hereafter. At the same time, a believer has to shun all negative attitudes as reflected in all kinds of prohibitions which will obstruct victory and success in this world and in the hereafter (Natsir, 2008, p.82).

In Islam, the title 'Slave of God' is neither derogatory nor demeaning. Instead, it is the core of the God-man relationship. Certain requirements must be fulfilled to gain the qualities of God's slave which are related to the goals of education. Natsir described the real characteristics of a slave of God as found in the following verse:

It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allah. Verily, Allah All-Mighty, Oft-Forgiving (Qur'an, 35:28).

It is obvious that one of the conditions of becoming God's slave is knowledge which can only be attained through education. God's servant is not supposed to isolate himself from the rest of the community and confine himself, for instance, to the thick jungle which is located in a remote area just to practise ritual services such as prayer and fasting. God has provided things which are in this universe to be utilized for the betterment of lives for all His servants:

Say: who has forbidden the adornment with clothes given by Allah, which He has produced for His slaves, and the things, clean and pure, (which He has provided) for sustenance?
Say: They are, in the life of this world, for those who

believe, (and) exclusively for them (believers) on the Day of Judgment. Thus We explain the Signs in detail for those who have knowledge (Qur'an, 7: 32).

Natsir defined '*ibadullah* (slaves of God) as those whose status is elevated by God to lead the community. They obey His law, perform righteous deeds, and worship Him:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness - to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing (Qur'an, 2: 177)

The foregoing discussion shows that for Natsir, the real mission of human life in this world, at the same time becomes the goal and objective of Islamic education. This is what should be implanted in the minds of Muslim youths to maintain peace and happiness in the community. Natsir also held that the ideal Islamic system, which is expected to produce a person who will dedicate his life for the cause of his Lord who created him and the whole universe, in reality, represents the real mission of life. He did not bother whether the knowledge comes from Western or Eastern sources as long as it could increase the insights of a person to galvanize the goodness and to serve the community for justice (Natsir, 2008, p.84).

At the end, he concluded his argument by quoting the verse of the Qur'an which he regarded as the main objective of Islamic education in producing future generations of the *ummah*, which is having a balance life:

Thus have We made of you an *ummah* justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves (Qur'an, 2: 143).

Considering Natsir's concept and objective of Islamic education, the syllabus used by Natsir at the private institution that he established in the 1930s remains unclear. Not much has been written about the curriculum of that school. The data only mentioned that Natsir focused on the important subject of *tawhid* and interpretation of the Qur'anic text through the use of analytical thinking. All we know is that his education system was similar to that of the *Muhammadiyah* organization. When we look at *Muhammadiyah* system of education, Islamic religious subjects comprised approximately 20% of the entire curriculum, the rest being secular subjects. In addition, Natsir added subjects related to agriculture, music and drama for the students.

Conclusion

Natsir's view of an integrated education is to combine both realms of religious and secular knowledge. He regarded education as the vehicle for the reconstruction of the Muslim *ummah* from its backwardness. The objective of Islamic education is to produce graduates who have a balance between intellectualism and religious commitment. Regarding the quality and benefit of education, Natsir did not make any distinction related to the goodness of education whether it comes from Islam or from the West. For him, the Muslim world and the West gave complementary contributions to humanity and thus those who totally undermine the Western system of education were narrow-minded. The so-called integrated Islamic education should not heavily emphasize on the spiritual aspect while ignoring the significance of worldly knowledge.

The concept of education in the hands of Natsir is quite general. He did not offer the details of the curriculum. Islamic religious subjects such as the Qur'an and *hadith* of the Prophet (pbuh) essentially require in-depth analysis as they can attract the students' interest and help them to relate to religious practices. Nevertheless, his theory of integrated education aimed to provide students with an enhanced educational experience, empowering them with knowledge to effect positive change to themselves and the society. His theory encapsulates the idea of the right balance of integrated knowledge which seeks to produce a harmonious and tolerant society for nation building and progress.

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