English Literary Studies: Including Islamic Perspectives in Pedagogy and Practice

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Abstract

Proponents of the integration of Islam into English literary studies seek, by way of presenting Islamic worldviews in relation to the life-worlds that English texts presumably promote, to inform (Muslim) students and practitioners of the subject about possible untoward influences in order to help them withstand cultural captivity and lifestyle effects. This is part of the wider concept of integrating Islam into human knowledge, which functions across a broad range of subject areas and generally refers to a method of looking at academic disciplines from Islamic perspectives and enlightening the reader about relevant Islamic teachings. Based on this theoretical premise, in this article I focus on the need for and three important ways of teaching English literature: inculcating Islamic/moral values, identifying predominant themes and ideas inherent in literary texts and looking at them from Islamic perspectives, and reforming the curriculum.

Keywords: English literature; Islamic pedagogy; Islam and English; Islamic education; English literature curriculum

Introduction

A sense of irreconcilability and mutual exclusivity is perhaps a common experience of Muslim students and academicians engaged with the discipline

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of English literature. There is a widespread assumption that English studies is a colonial subject, and thus it is often associated with hostility toward Islam and Muslims.[1] A serious intellectual engagement and a robust exchange of scholarly ideas between a scholar of English literature and a scholar of Islamic sciences generally sounds improbable, mainly because of the perceived remoteness of their respective fields. In other words, a conversation between an English literature professor and an imam may not continue for long, as they are presumed to belong to different worldviews. It is also likely that both parties may make kidding, incisive remarks about each other when they are among their colleagues and away from their supposed academic and intellectual "other."

One can perhaps easily find English literature professors who may have a tendency to caricature people linked with masjids and madrasas. Such a predisposition and orientation of the subject's practitioners resonate with writer and broadcaster Mark Tully's observation: "But perhaps the most damaging of all the effects of English is to promote the snobbery of the English-speaking elite."[2] Especially in Muslim societies, many members of the English-educated privileged class generally associate graduates of Islamic seminaries with backwardness, archaism, and primitivism. This is, in fact, not because the madrasa-affiliated ulama are essentially illiterate or uneducated, but mainly because the Muslims' perceived backwardness is measured in terms of their failure "to avail themselves of western education."[3] As a result, even if a madrasa student spends a comparable amount of time to acquire a formal education in Islamic sciences, his counterpart with an English education may look down upon him and even regard him as "uneducated" and "anachronistic." Conversely, many people in the discipline of Islamic sciences tend to overgeneralize and conceive wrong notions about western/English-educated graduates and elites by branding them as "anti-Islamic" or "secular" and by declaring the teaching and learning of English literature *ḥarām* (forbidden).

The above cases may represent two extreme ends of the spectrum. However, it may be correct to say that especially in Muslim countries, Islam and English literature are commonly viewed as "opposing entities" and therefore incompatible. Accordingly, their practitioners have a negative view of each other. Many teachers and students of madrasa seminaries associate their English studies counterparts with "westernization" and "colonial modernity." Similarly, many of the latter, in a quintessentially (neo-)Orientalist manner, regard the former as "backward" and "old-fashioned." One can argue, however, that the division is not only between these two groups, but also between "those for whom English is the medium of instruction in prestigious … schools, and those who largely study English as a subject in ordinary government schools."[4]

In almost all of the former British colonies, including the Muslim ones, there is a growing number of English-medium schools, colleges, and universities catering, in most cases, to students from privileged economic backgrounds. In some cases these students are so exclusively engrossed in learning English and western ideas that their lack of adequate knowledge of the local language and cultural practices, along with the inculcation of western values and tastes, is considered a mark of "class" and elitism. Those who cannot or do not receive an English education from such institutions are usually denied the prestige enjoyed by the English-educated elite class. To be more precise, the proliferation of English education during and after the colonial period has divided the colonized into different categories, perhaps due to an imprecise perception of the subject. The most notable manifestation of such multiple divisions within Muslim society caused by the introduction of English studies is the divergence between Islam and English education, that is, between the ulama and the English-educated elite, as well as between the graduates of ordinary schools and those of English-medium private institutes.

The above discussion raises two important questions: What is the basis of this perception of incongruity between Islamic values and English studies? Is it based on prejudice and ignorance alone, or on a sense of cultural domination predicated upon the imperial control associated with English literature? To find correct answers to such questions, we may need to go back to the genesis of English's introduction as a subject of study in the colonized countries. We may also need to assess the predominant attitudes and prevailing tendencies of the overwhelming majority of English literature students and scholars, along with the values they apparently hold. The lifestyle of many English literature Muslim graduates and the worldview they represent as part of a by-product of exposure to the subject may corroborate the original colonial intent of introducing English literature, that is, the cultural colonization of the colonized or "as a strategy of containment." As Viswanathan puts it:

> Indeed, the fact that English literary study had its beginnings as a strategy of containment raises a host of questions about the interrelations of culture, state, and civil society and the modes of assertion of authority within that network of relations.[5]

The Imperialist Motive behind Introducing English Literature

Scholars like Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), Michel Foucault (1926-84), and Edward Said (1935-2003) believe that the (western) knowledge system is not neutral and is used as a tool to establish

hegemonic control over other nations and races. Nietzsche's concept of "the will to power," Gramsci's notion of "hegemony," Foucault's framework of power/knowledge relations and notion of "episteme," and Said's critique of Orientalism all point to "western knowledge's complicity with western power."[6] Scholars of postcolonial studies consider the introduction of English studies in the colonies in the same light and have articulated the close linkage and precise correlation between knowledge (for that matter, English studies) and the continuing effects of imperialism and colonial power. In other words, in their eyes this subject is thought to have been introduced mainly to colonize the subjugated nations culturally in order to sustain and perpetuate colonial dominance. As Sanjay Seth puts it: "Along with guns and goods, this knowledge traveled to the colonies, and it was in part through this knowledge that the non-western world came to be conquered, represented and ruled."[7]

Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*, states that "intellectual and moral leadership" materialized through 'hegemonic activity' is the preferred method of 'supremacy of a social group'[8] because "cultural domination operates by consent, indeed often preceding conquest by force."[9] Cultural domination is by nature subtle and does not involve the use of the crude military force, and thus it has the latent ability to keep the underdog oblivious of material exploitation. Gauri Viswanathan observes:

> In effect, the strategy of locating authority in [English literary] texts all but effaced the sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance. Making the Englishman known to the natives through the products of his mental labour served a valuable purpose in that it removed from him the plane of ongoing colonialist activity – of commercial operations, military expansion, administration of territories – and de-actualized and diffused his material presence in the process.[10]

It is in this spirit that, before establishing full-scale colonial domination, the British colonizers introduced English literature in India. At a time when the British administrators were gripped by "fears of native insubordination," they "discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education."[11] John McLeod provides a more precise picture of this undertaking and believes that "the teaching of English literature in the colonies must be understood as part of the many ways in which Western colonial powers such as Britain asserted their cultural and moral superiority while at the same time devaluing indigenous cultural products."[12] What is more, the cultural-intellectual effect of introducing English literature did not end with the cessation of formal colonial

rule. Even after "decolonization," the "former" colonized still regard English literature highly and have regular encounters with its texts.

This is exactly what the practiced colonial administrator and prominent Anglicist Charles Edward Trevelyan (1807-86) anticipated upon establishing the subject at tertiary level in India. He maintains that the colonized students "daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works, and form ideas, perhaps higher idea of [England] than if their intercourse with it were of a more personal kind."[13] Hence, Viswanathan regards "the English literary text" as "a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state."[14] Students in the postcolonial world study the works of English writers with unswerving dedication and commitment; many go on to embrace, adopt, and internalize the lifestyle pattern they come across in English literary texts. As a result, they undergo a cultural metamorphosis and run the risk of becoming deracinated from their native religious and cultural traditions.

Given this complex relationship between western knowledge and colonialism in the postcolonial world, English literature's position must be determined and placed in a realistic context for specific learners. Its practitioners may need to understand it against the backdrop of a substantial body of literature that regards its spread as part of western imperialism and cultural domination, as well as the colonizer's imposition of a set of values. This is exactly what the simultaneous and subversive (postcolonial) processes of "abrogation" and "appropriation" of colonial texts and practices intend to do in the quest for an identity that is clearly and unapologetically de-centered by negotiating the gap between "worlds." This postcolonial strategy finds a kind of approximation in the concept of the integration of Islam into the (human) knowledge undertaking in general and into English studies in particular.[15]

Robert Eaglestone provides a succinct account of the introduction of English at the tertiary level into British India, which confirms the argument discussed above. He posits that until 1813, the colonial administration funded Christian missionary activities through the East India Company, thinking that Christian Indians would be "more supportive of the Company's colonial exploitation"[16] and accept colonial rule without much complaint. But the colonizers foresaw an ideological, moral problem here: Colonialism, by its very nature, exploits and expropriates, whereas Christianity is supposedly based on a stated moral foundation of love and mercy. Given these mutually opposite tendencies, the colonizers were not ready to confront "searching questions about anything, in case their regime itself came into question."[17]

This dilemma later led to the curtailment of sponsoring missionary activities. Meanwhile, the colonial administration was looking for an alternative that would produce "good Company servants"[18] and soften the colonized minds

to colonial rule, one that would not necessarily involve any moral evaluation of its imperialist policies. Eventually they shifted their focus from proselytization to the education movement, which has perennially been used to buttress imperialist ideologies. They emphasized teaching English literature to "civilize" the native population and universalize British artistic, literary work, thereby promoting western culture. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin state: "[S]earching for a method of communicating the values of Western civilization to Indians … the administration discovered the power of English Literature as a vehicle for imperial authority."[19] This is how British colonial power and English studies became complicitous, more intimately connected and invested within each other as power-knowledge, which is perhaps the reason why scholars like Edward Said regard imperialism as "an educational movement."[20] While its earlier phase was the Orientalist conceptualization of non-western religions and cultures, its relatively later version is the introduction of English studies along with such subjects as history, anthropology, and philosophy.

The long-lasting, ongoing debate among British educationalists and officialdom in India about the colony's future education system continued during the 1830s. The dispute was actually over "whether the British India government should prioritize 'Oriental' knowledges, or whether it should direct its attentions solely to promoting western knowledge, initially through the medium of English."[21] British scholars were "by now sharply divided into two opposing camps, Anglicists and Orientalists."[22] The latter argued that the British administration should introduce English education but also continue providing Indian students with knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic, which had been the case for a few decades before the English Education Act was passed in 1835, for at the beginning "English did not supersede Oriental studies but was taught alongside it."[23] However, the former wanted the colonial administration to spend government money exclusively on English education.

In the midst of this intra-British intellectual battle, London sent the historian and politician Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-59) to serve on the Supreme Council of India. He remained in this position from 1834 to 1838. It is believed that he was aware of this debate before assuming the position of the Law Member of the Governor-General's Council in December 1834. Governor-General William Bentinck then appointed him president of the General Committee of Public Instruction, which had been debating and deliberating colonial education policy in India. As president, he did not participate in the ongoing education debate directly; however, when Bentinck sought his view on the subject "he recorded on 2 February 1835 a long rhetorical minute stating strongly the case for the introduction of English education in India and holding out a threat to resign if his recommendations were not accepted."[24]

Macaulay's capable persuasion and recommendation in "Minute on Education in India (1835)," when coupled with this threat to resign, strengthened the resolve of Bentinck, who already "believed that it was English education alone that could cure the Indian society of its various evils."[25] Accordingly, he "had not only been keeping in his cupboard a skeleton of the order which he was to issue on the subject of English education on 7 March 1835 but also had been steadily pursuing a policy of gradual introduction of English education in India since 1829."[26] Thus both men gave their stamp of approval to the Anglicists' view, and the latter passed the following resolution on March 7, 1835:

> His Lordship-in-Council directs that all the funds which these reforms will leave at the disposal of the Committee be henceforth employed in imparting to the Native population knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of the English language.[27]

Since then "India's colonial rulers became the agency for promoting 'western education,' that is, education which sought to disseminate modern, western knowledge through modern institutions and pedagogic processes."[28] Importantly, the "plea on behalf of English literature had a major influence on the passing of the English Education Act in 1835, which officially required the natives of India to submit to its study."[29] Although English literature had been imparted to the Indians in various capacities even before 1835, with this verdict it received all-out administrative and institutional support and patronization. As a result, it became more widely taught, especially in institutions of higher learning. More importantly, this edict established English literature as a subject of study for the first time in history. Ironically, it happened in India and not in England, where it became a university subject only after World War I.

Trevelyan comments on the English Education Act 1835 thus: "The decision which was come to is worthy of everlasting record. Although homely in its words, it will be mighty in its effects long after we are mouldering in the dust."[30] Indeed, his words were extremely prescient. While English literature as an academic discipline and university subject had its beginning in India, it has now spread all over the world. In fact, the department of English has emerged as an integral part of universities internationally.

The colonizers treated India as a test case for introducing English literature. Its success there prompted them to follow the same process in other colonies, such as in British Malaya during the 1940s. The Allahabad-based Anglo-Indian newspaper *The Pioneer* (established in 1865) remarked on this experiment with western, English education in India thus: "[T]he experiment [of western education] going on in India is one which […] has had no parallel in the world's history."[31] Like Trevelyan's, this comment was predictive, and today we see

the widest possible impact of that colonial decision, for the English language and its literature have now reached the furthest corners of the planet. The subject has, perhaps, become more popular in the non-English-speaking former colonies of Britain than in England itself, as Ania Loomba observes that at Delhi University alone each of its "140,000 odd students must study English literature for at least one year during their undergraduation. There are over 700 lecturers in the subject."[32] A similar survey in other Commonwealth countries may manifest a comparable pattern of this subject's preponderance.

As mentioned earlier, India was the first country into which English literature as a subject of study was introduced. In England it was previously considered suitable only for "second- or third-rate minds" and "only as a pastime for lesser minds."[33] After a long-standing debate between the proponents and opponents of introducing English literature into British universities, it entered the curriculum of Cambridge University in 1917 and finally became "really established as a subject" in England after World War I.[34] As it was introduced in India to civilize the indigenous people, in England it was meant to "re-civilise the native savages," that is, the country's working-class people.[35]

Macaulay sketched out the British Indian education policy's primary objectives and outlined the perceived rationale for introducing English education into India in his "Minute":

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.[36]

As discussed before, this colonial holdover of English education is intended to produce individuals, more specifically westernized local elites, who would promote western thought and values and thus propagate an elitist, alien culture. Due to this policy's far-reaching consequences, the colonial mentality continues to operate long after the end of formal colonial rule and finds expression in the attitudes and behavioral practices of the educated elites in the former colonies where English studies is considered a status marker and is prioritized over other humanities subjects. As a result, this subject produces brown sahibs, many of whom have "the wealth with which to buy education in the mother country."[37] Those members of the westernized elite who have been taken through English education are the privileged group in former British colonies, as the "route to power, prestige, and riches, even today, lies

through English."[38] In most cases, they have access to those higher positions of power previously occupied by the Europeans and to the privileges attached thereto. Thus, they function as regional colonial surrogates.

Macaulay and Bentinck wanted to produce only "interpreters" or "an army of clerks who could fill the lower ranks of the British administration in India. … But in fact they turned out to be the oppressors, not the interpreters, proud of their status as brown sahibs, although never accepted as such by the white sahibs."[39] This reminds us of the native fireman in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), who works for the ship and tries desperately to look like a European. But Charles Marlow, the narrator, still regards him as a "savage" although "an improved specimen." Marlow describes him thus: "He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs."[40]

Like this native fireman, these brown sahibs or comprador intellectuals are never accepted as equals by their colonial masters. But like the former colonial oppressors, they use their skills to "manipulate the masses" in the indigenous community.[41] In this respect, Tully quotes Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948): "It is we the English-knowing Indians that have enslaved India. The curse of the nation will not rest upon the English but upon us."[42] In other words, even in the world of "decolonization" the colonized are subject to proxy oppression, as they fall victim to ongoing epistemic and cultural hegemony mainly through the comprador elites – those who are exposed to western learning in general and English studies in particular, who are the carriers of the western culture and modernity that have been instilled in them by the process of education.

The local elites – trained in and overwhelmed by western cultural biases, saturated with money and influence – to a great extent internalize and embody stereotypical colonial attitudes in their own dealings with indigenous people. Their thoughts and practices are largely mediated by and imbued with what they learn from (English) colonial education, which continues to prevail in their lands. In this respect, English literary texts represent a body of knowledge that is perceived to be superior to other knowledge systems and is considered to be value-free and culturally neutral. But postcolonial critics refuse to accept such a claim, as the preceding discussion has established the value of English literature as an imperial tool. Thus it would be naïve to regard English literary texts as simply self-referential aesthetic phenomena, for they are "value-laden and inextricably linked to some cultural and religious ideas"[43] that are mostly alien to their recipients. However, these texts are dutifully taught and studied at universities in former colonies and thus challenge and change the worldviews of many indigenous learners who, upon exposure to the subject, tend to imitate the western way of life.

The Culture of Mimicry

The most blatant manifestation of the endemic effects of colonial education in general and of English literature in particular is the culture of mimicry. This widely regnant attitude among most of the subjects' learners and practitioners is reflected in their conscious or subconscious belief that it is part of their academic practice to adopt "the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values."[44] Thus they exhibit a tendency to imitate the English in as many ways as possible. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon describes this compulsive mimicry of European (and neo-European) ways of life by demonstrating that "the vast majority of the colonized intellectuals desperately try to imitate the colonizers' cultural code and thus to enjoy a privileged status among the colonized."[45] What is more, Fanon suggests that those among the colonized who mimic colonial culture, despite experiencing all of the accompanying colonial subjugation and exploitation, are "idiots in this world."[46] As the colonizers introduced western disciplines to dominate the colonized without the use of military force, a section of the colonized ape colonial masters to establish domination over, and enjoy a superior power position in relation to, the vast majority of their compatriots who do not have enough resources to gain access to colonial western education and culture.

Perhaps, the common perception that English literature is associated with the western way of life causes them to behave in a particular, alien manner. Practitioners of English studies embrace many extrinsic features during their initiation into the subject. As cultural metamorphosis and a resultant westernized outlook are among the usual outcomes of inculcating English studies in Muslim students, the importance of including Islamic perspectives in the pedagogy and practice of English literary studies as a defense mechanism cannot be overemphasized. This intellectual antidote seeks to inform Muslim learners of English studies about the probable alien, anti-Islamic influences emanating from their exposure to the subject, and to present the Islamic, alternative worldview in reference to some of the ideas promoted by its literary texts.

Islamic Perspectives on English Literature: Pedagogy and Practice

It follows from the preceding discussion that the introduction of English literature as a subject of study was part of a much wider project of colonial modernity and cultural imperialism. Consequently, its students and practitioners manifest a wide variety of influences and behaviors in their lifestyle patterns, attitudes, and routine activities, all of which confirm the need to look at this subject from an Islamic perspective. However, such an intellectual ap-

proach may cause unease and elicit a reaction of surprise and shocked hilarity among many.

Mohd Kamal Hassan recognizes this and regards the launch of such an enterprise as "the most challenging intellectual and academic enterprise ever undertaken" in Islamic discourses.[47] This observation is concerned not only with English literature but also with other humanities and social sciences subjects, like sociology and anthropology, that are generally deemed to be of colonial origin as well as carrying "un-Islamic" values. A scholarly undertaking to scrutinize such subjects may apparently suggest that it intends to hammer together two diametrically opposed and oppositely inclined worldviews and two sets of values. This is particularly the case with English literature, which is generally perceived as an academic subject that is, by its very nature, hostile to Islam. However, this is far from what this intellectual approach actually means and proposes to accomplish, as will be detailed in the following discussion. In view of that, I mention three important areas that need to be addressed while including Islamic perspectives in the pedagogy and practice of English literature in order to protect learners from the potential, untoward cultural influences emanating from the subject.

Inculcating Islamic Values

Inculcating Islamic values or imbuing students with widely held and universally accepted moral/Islamic values and with a sense of commitment to do good to others is actually important for the pedagogical practice of all disciplines. The best way to instill them is for the lecturers to embrace the concept of *murabbī* in teaching and pedagogical practices and act accordingly, especially in the classroom setting. Islamic education defines *murabbī* as an educator "who combines a life of learning with a life of virtue, and hence a perfect and an ideal person to learn from."[48] Embracing this concept is crucial in the current pedagogical practice, as not many teachers and lecturers are worth viewing as role models. As Harvard scholar Harry Lewis observes: "Professors are hired as scholars and teachers, not as mentors of values and ideals to the young and confused."[49] What is more worrying is that very few "of today's professors enter academia as a mission, a noble calling."[50] Unfortunately, both the twenty-first century academia and academics seem to have tiptoed "away from moral education,"[51] which has had far-reaching negative consequences.

Universities are no longer viewed as sites of moral high ground, and their graduates have no greater claim on moral or ethical values. Lewis' stark warning is pertinent here: "[S]ociety is going to hell in a hand basket, and the great universities are going to get there first."[52] In other words, even though deca-

dence and moral degradation have gripped the entire fabric of the social system, universities are the worst affected by this tsunami of decay. When moral crisis and degeneration are widespread in the social order, universities are supposed to play a crucial role in restoring fundamental moral values. However, considering Lewis' observation, such an expectation today will meet only disappointment. This caveat perhaps triggered him "to expose the other side of Harvard"[53] through his monumental work *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (2006), an account of how America's great universities have abandoned the core value of education and learning.

Today's world has witnessed the rise of a rebellious, unhealthy youth culture largely based upon the homogenization of western tastes and lifestyles, passion for fashion and luxury products without any restraints, violent entertainment frenzy and hysteria, and irresponsible use of social networking media. In such a cultural context, it may not be appropriate for educators to remain complacent by doing no more than performing their conventional duties, namely, just providing learners with some facts and figures, transmitting the texts' contents in the classroom, but ignoring their moral health. Lecturers should be professionally and morally obligated to serve as role models both in word and deed. The classroom setting is the best place in which teachers can positively influence students as well as provide them with the necessary guidance, counseling, and other useful real-life instructions and life direction. If they fail to mold the character of the self and others (students), they may not be able to equip their society's future leaders with the necessary useful knowledge and moral-ethical rectitude that will enable them to play a positive role in guiding others.

As is evident in various verses of the Qur'an (e.g., 2:31-32, 4:58, 55:1-4, and 96:1-5), God associates Himself with the calling of teaching as well as proclaims that the act and art of teaching are associated with Him. What is more, Prophet Muhammad regards God as his teacher: "My Lord educated me [taught me good conduct] and so made my education most excellent."[54] God taught all prophets and, through revelation and the real-existential, continues to teach all human beings: "[A]nd remember the favor of God upon you, and that which He has revealed to you of the Book and the Wisdom, educating you thereby" (Q. 2:231). So God is a teacher in a much greater sense of the term, as it is He Who is the source of knowledge and creates the capacity in human beings to learn.

The next one in this hierarchy is Prophet Muhammad, who clearly and most famously stated: "I have certainly been sent as a teacher."[55] A number of Qur'anic verses describe his action plan as a teacher. The Qur'an mentions Prophet Ibrahim's and his son Prophet Ismail's supplication: "Our Lord! Raise

up among them a Messenger from among themselves who shall recite to them Your communications and teach them the Book and the wisdom, and purify them; surely You are the Mighty, the Wise" (Q. 2:129). God granted their prayer and thus addresses humanity: "Even as We have sent among you a Messenger from among yourselves who recites to you Our communications and purifies you and teaches you the Book and the wisdom and teaches you that which you did not know" (Q. 2:151).

Along with conveying God's message and teaching his contemporaries the Book and wisdom, one important aspect of Prophet Muhammad's action plan as a teacher is a comprehensive agenda and systematic strategy for purifying the student's inherent human character. This noble act is also associated with God, for "God purifies whom He pleases" (Q. 4:49). Thus moral purification is a basic element of Islamic pedagogy. Or, it can be said to be an important *sunnah* of God and His Prophet. If Muslim educators neglect this important and imperative duty as regards their students, they may be at fault for failing to comply with the Islamic pedagogical tradition. As a result, they may produce graduates who may excel in their professional domains but lack any moral and ethical commitment.

As widely expected, in terms of moral conduct and other matters of lifestyle those people who possess knowledge are supposed to excel those who do not. Hence, all lecturers need to do some introspection and determine if they are fulfilling their responsibility to produce students who excel in both knowledge and good manners. If they focus too much on transmitting facts and figures culled from the texts and do not look after their students' moral health, then they will swerve from the Islamic pedagogical practice.

Therefore, while looking at disciplines from Islamic perspectives is important, lecturers cannot ignore another crucial aspect of the so-called Islamization of Knowledge undertaking: the teacher-student dynamic, which is mainly concerned with the teacher's role in an educational setting. Mohd. Kamal Hassan regards this as the "'Islamicisation of the Self" that can be delivered through *jihād al-nafs* (striving against the base desires) and *taṭhīr al-qalb* (purification of the heart)."[56] If lecturers do not undertake this program in the classroom setting and beyond, they may end up producing graduates who may know some outward facts of this life but will be heedless about the life hereafter and its associated obligations. As the Qur'an states:

> [This is] God's promise. Never does God fail to fulfil His promise – but most people know [it] not: they know but the outer surface of this world's life, whereas of the ultimate things [the inner reality of this world's life and the ultimate reality of the hereafter] they are utterly unaware. (Q. 30:6-7)

This passage encompasses the Islamic concept of education, which includes both the knowledge of life in this world and the inner consciousness that propels its recipient toward leading a life of decency, integrity, and righteousness. If lecturers confine their professional duty to only teaching the course contents, they cannot provide students with a holistic Islamic education and may not be able to equip them with a good grounding in moral and Islamic values. In the Islamization of Knowledge movement, emphasis is generally placed upon Islamizing the disciplines' content. However, equal importance should be given to the teacher-student dynamic and teachers should be actively involved in purifying their students' hearts and molding their character.

For Muslim educators, purifying the student's character includes creating God-consciousness and awareness of the connection between mundane deeds and the rewards/retributions in the *ākhirah* (life hereafter) among the learners. People who may have accumulated skilled knowledge and systematic information about worldly matters and phenomenon but who do not relate their knowledge and understanding to God and have no concerns about the *ākhirah* cannot be considered truly educated, as the Qur'anic verses mentioned above state. On the contrary, the Qur'an regards proper knowledge very highly and celebrates the true scholars: "He (God) grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a great good and none but people of understanding mind (Q. 2:269)" and "God will exalt those of you who believe, and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees; and God is aware of what you do" (Q. 55:11).

Given the widespread moral perversion especially among the educated in today's world, teachers need to embrace the Qur'anic concept of education, which includes the continuous cognitive as well as moral development of the self. Educators may need to adopt the Islamic paradigm of teaching in their attempt to purify their students' character. Since English literature is widely associated with secular values, the urgency of this pedagogic commitment to purifying the student's character cannot be overstated in the English departments of universities, especially those located in Muslim-majority countries.

Looking at English Literary Texts from Islamic Perspectives

After inculcating moral/Islamic values, the next important task of English literature educators is to identify and separate anti-Islamic ideas in texts and create an awareness among their students of the ethical challenges involved. It is untenable to take English literary texts as purely aesthetic creations, for they also promote particular worldviews and are sometimes used as "propaganda machine[s]."[57] As Ali Ashraf states:

> Take the case of D. H. Lawrence for example. His presentation of human characters and certain human situations has natural validity but the way in which he has presented them, the method with which he rouses the emotions and demands the assent of the reader to a scheme of life in which sex plays the most dominant and most effective role, makes it difficult for the reader with religious feelings to accept this interpretation of life as something valid and true. What he has done is nothing but the universalization of something extremely personal.[58]

There are authors and texts in English literature who present ideas that are completely alien to Islam or incompatible with conventional moral principles. In such cases, it may be unbecoming of English literature lecturers of Muslim orientation to leave their students in the lurch to be misguided or confused by the maze of philosophies encountered. Some texts may promote anti-religion or amoral ideas, glorify illicit sexual behavior and relationships, or endorse pornographic tendencies. For example, this literary tradition contains a great deal of carpe diem poems that urge the reader to seize the moment and indulge in fleeting sexual pleasures without any concern for moral or religious values. They amiably and lightheartedly reproach the tendency of unmarried women to protect their virginity and chastity, and generally impel young beautiful women to "ignore conventional moral scruples, urge them to the bouts of erotic temptations and desires, and finally invite them to reciprocate man's carnal demands and interests, and to respond to his lust-filled sexual advances."[59]

Some notable carpe diem poems are John Donne's "The Flea" (1633) and "The Sun Rising" (1633), Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" (1648), and Andrew Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" (1681). These poems constitute invitations to women to respond to men's (extra-marital) sexual advances, which Muslim educators and students may not support. If lecturers do not provide students with the Islamic perspective while interpreting such works, they may end up reproducing and promoting the ideas inherent in them and thus sanction a hedonistic and permissive lifestyle of partying, drinking, gambling, and a variety of sexual behaviors.

Conversely, a great number of English literary texts promote ideas that are fully compatible with Islamic teachings. In such cases, it is important that English literature lecturers substantiate those ideas with evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah so that such ideas are deeply rooted in the students' consciousness. For example, many Victorian-era literary pieces promote social justice and condemn the oppression of women, children, and the underdog. Such ideas are fully compatible with Islamic teachings.

Other examples may include Alfred Tennyson's "Flower in the Crannied Wall" (1869) and Roald Dahl's "Television" (1964). The former shows that

contemplating nature can lead human beings to the recognition of God's existence, which corroborates with the Qur'an, whereas the latter emphasizes responsible parenting, the proper use of time, and the culture of reading, all of which are highly encouraged in Islam. Even though these poets are not Muslim, the ideas they promote are fully consistent with Islamic teachings. So while approaching English literary pieces, lecturers and students cannot adopt an attitude of uncritical reception or outright rejection. Islam embraces many ideas English literary pieces promote, while it rejects many others. Accordingly, Muslim lecturers who teach English literature are professionally and religiously obligated to interpret them in line with this theoretical premise.

A particular author or a text may convey divergent ideas, some of which may or may not be compatible with Islamic values. So, while handling such authors and texts a lecturer should do his/her best to discuss their pros and cons. Disregarding such a duty goes against the very notion of a teacher as *murabbī*. As Ali Ashraf states:

> If the teacher, on the other hand, takes a permissive attitude and considers a writer whose code of life is completely at variance with the Islamic code, and leaves students in vacua, and allows them to respond to that writing or be influenced by it as they like, he will not be doing justice either to literature or to his students. Literature can be extremely seductive and may even be misleading, corrosive and destructive.[60]

However, undertaking the venture of reading English texts from Islamic perspectives with complacent or uncritical eyes and inadequate knowledge may be counterproductive. Educators and researchers' lack of sufficient Islamic knowledge may render them apologetic when handling Islamic issues. For example, a thesis titled "Finding the Middle Path: Assimilation, Identity and Islam in Hanif Kureishi's 'The Black Album,'" seems to have located the "Islamic middle path" in Kureishi's representation of Islam and Muslims. Such an endorsement may baffle even Kureishi himself who, in his own words, created characters who interrogate Islam and counter "Islamo-fascists who believe themselves to be in possession of the Truth."[61]

According to Kureishi, "along with mythology, religions are among man's most important and finest creations – with God perhaps being his greatest idea of all," and in *The Black Album* the protagonist Shahid "learns how corrupt and stultifying these concepts can become."[62] Kureishi portrays characters who interrogate "Islam, liberalism, consumer capitalism"[63] in the same breath and seeks to establish some sort of equivalence between them. The protagonist Shahid says to another character Hat: "I'm sick of being bossed around, whether by Riaz or Chad or God himself.… What men and women

do, the things they make, must be more interesting than anything than God is supposed to do?"[64] What Shahid does in the novel is the complete rejection of faith in God and in Islam, and it is not simply his doubt in the religion. What is more, such a state of mind cannot be regarded as a manifestation of his "honest courage" and "open mindedness"[65] from an Islamic perspective. Islam highly encourages such commendable human attributes as courage and open-mindedness, but Shahid's open-mindedness transgresses the boundary between faith and unbelief. On the whole, the thrust and tone of the novel suggests that it "openly questions religion."[66] So viewing Kureishi's novel "as an 'Islamic' work"[67] will create in readers' mind confusion and obfuscation and may betray an apologetic tone, ideological bias, or self-defensive posture.

The researcher, albeit in the spirit of "Islamization," was supposed to give the Islamic viewpoints in relation to Kureishi's atheistic ideas; instead, she accepts them as compatible with Islam, which is a disservice to both Islam and to the argument the novelist is making. One has the intellectual liberty to support or promote atheistic ideas; however, mishandling such issues, endorsing agnostic philosophies, and branding them as "Islamic" are beyond the pale of accepted academic norms and values. Here Taha Jabir al-Alwani's observation is extremely pertinent: "To summarize, then, the Islamization of Knowledge undertaking may be pursued only by those endowed with a vast knowledge of the Qur'an and a firm grounding in the social sciences and humanities."[68] As regards English literary texts, a reasonably sound knowledge of Islam and of this literary tradition is essential for including Islamic perspectives in them.

Reforming the Curriculum

Curriculum is a crucial aspect of English literary studies. Since the subject has a colonial genesis, an uncritical reception of the conventional course syllabi may end up sustaining a neo-colonial, imperialist cultural agenda.

Said's review of the English departments' syllabi at Arab universities suggests that they do not reflect the "relationship between English and the colonial processes that brought the language and its literature" to the region.[69] While formulating an appropriate syllabus, two important things need to be considered: the subject's colonial origin and the "huge influx of new ideas into the discipline of English."[70] This is to say that the syllabi should include materials that debunk colonialist, racist ideology and incorporate postcolonial texts, especially those written by Muslim authors, and the latest practices of literary criticism.

In respect of including Muslim authors, which is also part of *iḥyā' al-turāth al-Islāmī* (reviving the Islamic heritage), the literature course contents of many universities in Muslim societies may manifest the almost complete absence of Muslim authors, while in some others their representation is very minimum. Among the Muslim writers included, writers with secular and anti-Islamic orientations seem to be given a disproportionately high attention. In this respect, Shelina Janmohamed's observation is pertinent.

> I wanted to contribute to the social discourse about gender and equality, but Muslim women who wore the veil by choice, and by extension who embraced Islam as a positive force, were not allowed to have a say. Only Muslim women who had openly rejected Islam were allowed to be part of the discussion.[71]

Course outlines of contemporary British literature at many universities, even in Muslim countries, may show that "Muslim" authors who reject Islam receive more attention than those who embrace it "as a positive force." The scope of this paper does not allow me to show in detail the relevance of Muslim writers to many English literature courses. However, I would like to shed light on two of them and show how the inclusion of Muslim authors is very possible and how Islamic writers are neglected.

Twentieth-century British literature courses can appropriately cover writers like Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936) and Martin Lings (1909-2005). The former is a prolific novelist, essayist, short-story and travel writer, even though his reputation as a writer has now been reduced to his translation of the Qur'an; the latter is a poet, literary critic, and Shakespeare scholar. Both of these Muslim writers are routinely neglected in literary history. As regards contemporary English literature, dozens of British Muslim writers and the vibrancy of their cultural life and literary production render their presence palpable and distinguish them among other ethnic writers in Britain. Their creative accomplishments and literary achievements are quite impressive. A quick look at the Muslim Writers Awards project, launched in 2006 (http://muslimwriters awards.org.uk) may give some idea about the prolificacy of their literary output. Some notable ones are Ziauddin Sardar (b. 1951), Qaisra Shahraz (b. 1958), Leila Aboulela (b. 1964), Mohsin Hamid (b. 1971), Rabina Khan (b. 1972), Shelina Zahra Janmohamed (b. 1974), Rekha Waheed (b. 1975), Na'ima B. Robert (b. 1977), Rageh Omaar (b. 1967), Robin Yassin-Kassab (b. 1969), Zahid Hussain (b. 1972), and all of whom somewhat use their literary career and creative works to exemplify various aspects of Islamic teachings.

Excluding such writers from contemporary English literature courses is a deplorable and an inexplicable anomaly. By making the case for including

Muslim writers, I by no means suggest the exclusion or replacement of non-Muslim writers. Rather, I argue for the proportional representation of writers belonging to various religious and ideological backgrounds so that students are exposed to various strands of thought and ideas. Marginalizing a section of writers because of their racial or religious orientation is a form of cultural profiling of the human spirit.

Conclusion

There is a tendency to associate English studies with western value systems, secularism, and anti-Islamic or sometimes Christian ideas. Hence, in order to counteract western and undesirable influences, scholars of postcolonial studies employ the twin strategy of "abrogation" and "appropriation" to create platforms for self-assertion and resistance. The way English literature is taught and received, especially at universities in the Muslim world, and the lifestyle pattern that many of its graduates and practitioners maintain, clearly point to a sense of irreconcilability between Islam and this particular subject. The canon of English literature does not target Islam or Muslims exclusively for caricaturing, nor is there anything in the religion that summarily dismisses the entire bulk of this literary tradition.[72] In fact, the putative rift between the two entities is actually due to how they are perceived.

English literature was introduced in British colonies to proliferate English manners and a specific way of life and, more importantly, to colonize the indigenous people culturally. The subject survived the formal demise of colonial rule, and its uncritical reception continued long after "decolonization." Scholars of postcolonial studies have attempted to strategize its teaching and learning by proposing the processes of "abrogation" and "appropriation" to disabuse its learners of the untoward cultural influence of English studies. However, regrettably, these twin strategies are still not fully applied in pedagogical practices. In such a context, an Islamic approach can be added as an alternative strategy to interpret English literary pieces.

It is in this spirit that English literature lecturers must embrace the concept of *murabbī* and inculcate Islamic and other widely accepted moral values into their students' consciousness, along with teaching them the content of English literary works. Given the fact that many English literature courses include texts that transmit philosophies and worldviews that contradict Islamic/moral values to one degree or another, the absence of Islamic perspectives while handling them may run the risk of conveying unintended messages to students.

Again, the absence of enough Muslim writers in relevant courses suggests a replication of the dominant tendency in formulating its curriculum, as it points

to a lack of searching minds. Muslim writers are largely marginalized in various literary traditions. Including those who have a firm Islamic commitment may serve as an antidote to the many un-Islamic ideas promoted by some English texts as well as enrich the subject. In short, English literature educators may need to embrace the Qur'anic concept of purifying the heart and instilling Islamic values in students, critique and substantiate literary texts in the spirit of the Islamic paradigm, and include relevant Muslim authors in different courses in order to deal with English literature from Islamic perspectives.

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