

## Broadening the dimensions of Islamization of knowledge: Mohd Kamal Hassan's perspective

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses the discourse of Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) during the last three decades with special reference to the views of Mohd Kamal Hassan who prefers an alternative term called "Islamicization." The term knowledge is considered the equivalent of *al-'ilm* as used in the Qur'an, which refers to the highest form of truth. Based upon interviews and content analysis of some of the sources, this study found that Kamal Hassan has advocated prefixing the word "knowledge" with the word "human". Additionally, realising the absurdity of the phrase "Islamization of Islamic Revealed Knowledge," Kamal Hassan has coined the term "Relevantization/Contextualization." By classifying the efforts incorporated in the Islamization of Human Knowledge (IOHK) into four essential categories and 21 types, he has identified a scope and space for each member of the *Ummah* in the movement for the realisation of IOHK. Furthermore, he has argued that since Islamization of knowledge includes the aspect of Islamicization of the self, even a layman could not be given an excuse from joining this movement. In addition, he argues that IOHK is not an exclusivist but a universal movement.

**Keywords:** Islamization, Islamicization, Human knowledge, Relevantization, Kamal Hassan.

### Introduction

Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) is an intellectual movement that emerged in the middle of 1970s to address the threats posed by modern Western civilizational and philosophical onslaughts. It has developed over four decades as a topic of serious academic deliberations and debates in the East as well as the West. Its theoretical and practical outlines were presented by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in his *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* in 1982. In this work, al-Faruqi identified the negative consequences of the secular-Islamic bifurcation of the

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educational system in the Muslim World which, according to him, accounted for the decline of the Muslim *Ummah* through de-Islamisation and demoralisation. As such, the need for IOK was strongly felt as an academic challenge and duty to initiate an Islamic intellectual movement for the reconstruction of the Ummah.

As part of this movement, the IOK identified that the textbooks used in Muslim educational institutions systematically keep the students estranged from Islam, Islamic heritage and civilisation. Furthermore, the modern secular knowledge develops secular attitudes devoid of Islamic moral philosophy and the sense of mission in life. Secondly, the IOK movement identified the problem of stagnation of Islamic thought and outdated method of teaching and learning. In this context, the IOK movement felt the need of relevantization and contextualization of Islamic philosophy and science in the academic disciplines of the educational institutions of the Muslim world. Finally, IOK is needed, beyond doubt, for the revival of the Ummah and Islamic civilization from the current predicament of the vagueness of vision, the weakness and corrosion of contemporary Islamic thought and its methodology that underlies the current malaise including underdevelopment, corruption, inefficiency, inappropriate and insufficient education and weakness of the moral character.

Based upon an interview conducted on June 6, 2014, and content analysis of some of his writings, this article outlines the understanding of Mohd Kamal Hassan, a distinguished intellectual of the movement of IOK. It argues that Kamal Hassan's understanding substantially and essentially differs from the conventional understanding of the term IOK. He places greater emphasis on simultaneous Islamization of the self of the academic and academic disciplines.

### **Major conceptual framework of IOK**

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi rightly asserted that the IOK movement does not demand a reform of Islamic education by blending its curriculum with Western education since its worldview of reality, life and history are equally alien to what Islamic education proposes (al-Faruqi, 1982: ix). Al-Faruqi called for and pursued the rebuilding of disciplines such as the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences on the foundation of the Islamic worldview and principles of ethics and morality. "There can be no doubt that Islam is relevant to all aspects of thinking, of living, of being. This relevance must be articulated unmistakably in each discipline" (al-Faruqi, 1982: 5).

As part of methodological improvement and developmental process of Islamic thought and education, the IOK movement identified two major approaches which are: firstly, Islamic knowledge and education should be accessible to everybody and it should not remain as an elective subject, but as core and required by all those who hold the duty of *Khilafah* (vicegerency) and ‘*Ubudiyah* (servitude). Secondly, the presentation of Islam as a cluster of ‘*ibadat* that aggravates *ummah*’s malaise. Islam must be understood as a comprehensive religion, the vision of which is relevant to every human activity and to every endeavour—whether physical, social, economic, political, cultural or spiritual. It is unlike any other religion (al-Faruqi, 1982: 17).

Another aspect of IOK, according to Syed Muhammed Naquib al-Attas, is de-westernization of Knowledge. He has emphasized that knowledge is not neutral, but always infused with the religious and cultural values and worldview of the person and the dominant civilization that projects it (Wan Mohd, 1997: 7). Therefore, al-Attas defines Islamization as “the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, national-cultural tradition, and then from secular control over his reason and his language” (Al-Attas, 1978: 41). The essential spirit of Western culture and civilization is absolutely against the spirit of Islamic culture. Even though there are positive aspects of Western civilisation, it is however overtaken by materialist and corrupt worldviews. According to al-Attas, “the modern university is the epitome of man in a condition of *zulm*, and such a condition is maintained by the encouragement and elevation and legitimization of doubt and conjecture as epistemological tools of scientific enquiry” (Al-Attas, 1978: 148). That is the reason why the IOK movement cannot achieve its objectives unless the process of de-westernization is made certain as a prerequisite; and is considered as one of the major aspects of IOK. Thirdly, the concept of truth and knowledge in Islam is absolutely different from what Western worldview advocates. Instead of relying merely upon the human reason and rationality, Islamic concept of truth is constituted upon the revealed knowledge from the Almighty Allah (SWT) and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). These are considered the ultimate sources of truth and knowledge. Human reason and rationality are inseparable, but the knowledge derived from these sources is subject to the revealed sources. The generation of Islamic knowledge is through a combination of *tawhid*, *khilafah*, *amanah*, *ibadah*, ‘*ilm*, *wahy* and ‘*aql* (Moten, 2006: 1).

The scope and domain of IOK are issues upon which the experts on Islamization maintain certain differences. According to Kamal Hassan, not all disciplines and sciences need Islamization. He argues that “Islamization of Islamic sciences” would be contradiction in terms. Therefore, Kamal Hassan has come up with concepts such as “relevantization” or “contextualization” of religious sciences (Mohd Kamal Hassan, 2013: 42). He describes its connotations as *Islah, Tajdid, Ijtihad, Ihya, Tashih, Iadat al-Nazar, Bina Jadid*. As such Kamal Hassan has defined Islamization of Human Knowledge as “an alternative paradigm of constructing and developing knowledge as well as education in accordance with the worldview of Islam” (Mohd Kamal Hassan, 2013: 37). He has specified that one of the most significant objectives of IOK is “the realization of a universal, balanced and integrated civilization based upon the harmony of divine revelation and human reason which upholds the principles of achieving “goodness in this world” and “goodness in the Hereafter” (Mohd Kamal Hassan, 2013: 41). This led him to coin his concept of the Islamization of Human Knowledge (IOHK).

### **Kamal Hassan: A brief introduction**

Professor Dr. Mohd Kamal Hassan, the third Rector of International Islamic University Malaysia, is a renowned Islamic scholar and an ardent advocate of the Islamization of Knowledge movement. He developed working papers for both the establishment of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 1983 and the formation of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences in IIUM in 1989. In 1999, when he was appointed the Rector of the IIUM, he expanded the activities of Islamization of Knowledge and included it in the University documents, especially in its Constitution and made it “the most important mission” of the university.

Born on 26 October 1942 in Pasir Mas, Kelantan, Malaysia, Kamal Hassan received his first degree in Islamic Studies from Universiti Malaya (UM) in 1965 and completed his Masters and PhD (1975) degrees from Columbia University, New York. He became the Head of the Department of Usuluddin and Philosophy at the University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in 1979. He began his career at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) as Shaikh al-Kulliyah in 1983 and became the first Dean of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), IIUM and eventually the Rector of IIUM from 1999 to 2006 after serving as Deputy Rector (Academic) from 1990-1997. The foci of his writings are mainly on philosophy, religion, social issues and education. Some

of his famous works include: *The Encyclopaedia of Malaysia: Religions and Beliefs* (as editor), *Islamic Identity Crisis in the Muslim Community in Contemporary Malaysia*, *Islamic Studies in Contemporary Southeast Asia: General Observations*, and *Al-Islam fi al-'alam al-Malayu*. His field of specialisation is contemporary Islamic thought in Southeast Asia and his focus of research interest is integration and Islamization of contemporary human knowledge. At present, he works as a Distinguished Professor, at the International Institute of Islamic Thought (ISTAC), Kuala Lumpur, International Islamic University Malaysia.

Regarding the drives behind his dedication to promoting Islamic philosophy of education in contemporary times, especially in International Islamic University Malaysia, Kamal Hassan has pointed out three major factors (Interview, 2014). First is the belief in Islam as a complete way of life which embraces all aspects of human life, and most important is the educational aspect of human life. To him, the modern educational system was westernised during the colonial period in almost all Muslim majority countries. The result was the emergence of two systems; the religious on the one hand and the secular on the other. This has produced serious negative consequences in the Muslim societies because the leaders of the Muslim countries during and after the colonial periods came from the Westernised and secularised elites and not from the religious elites. Given the fact that the religious elites were detached from the modern Western science and languages and their knowledge was confined mainly to the religious sciences, the secularised and Westernised elites dominated the political and decision-making process. Kamal Hassan realised this and became involved in efforts at changing the situation.

Second, the fact that Kamal Hassan's specialisation is Islamic thought in Southeast Asia, he has always been very concerned about the secular modernisation in Muslim countries. Moreover, as a student in the University of Malaya as well as in the United States, he was involved in the activities of Muslim students' association. Through that association, he began to comprehend the urgent need for transforming modern educational system. His life as a student of Islamic Revealed Knowledge is the second major reason for this dedication (Interview, 2014).

The third factor is the International Islamic University (IIUM) itself, which was established in 1983, to achieve among other objectives, the goal of the unity of knowledge and ending the dichotomy of the religious and secular education.

IIUM started with the philosophy of integration of human knowledge (*'ulum al dunya*) and religious knowledge (*'ulum al-din*). IIUM has the mission of IIICE which refers to Integration, Internationalization, Islamization and Comprehensive Excellence. This mission statement lays down the foundation and rationale for pursuing the mission of Islamization of human knowledge for Kamal Hassan (Interview, 2014).

### **Kamal Hassan's understanding of "Islamicisation" of human knowledge**

Regarding the appropriate term to denote the IOK movement, Kamal Hassan has maintained a separate stand from other scholars. He prefers to term it Islamicization rather than Islamization. He has formulated the concept based on two inter-related ideas which are: 1) Islamicisation of Human Knowledge; and 2) Relevantization of Islamic revealed knowledge. He argues that "Islamization of Knowledge" is vague and confusing because "knowledge" corresponds to *al-'ilm* which is referred to in the Qur'an as an embodiment of the highest order of Truth. Therefore, Islamization of knowledge is a contradiction in terms because the Qur'anic *'ilm* cannot be further Islamized. Instead, the aim should be to correct the knowledge derived from human rationality and reasoning, because such knowledge is subject to errors and can potentially be contradictory with Islamic knowledge (Mohd Kamal Hassan, 2013: 35).

Kamal Hassan has argued that "Islamisation" implies "the conversion of knowledge to Islam, whereas the term 'Islamicisation' has a connotation of a process of conforming things to Islamic principles or being in harmony with the teachings of Islam" (Mohd Kamal Hassan, 2013: 43). He has provided certain justifications to support his argument as follows:

1. "The term 'Islamicisation' includes the idea that something is allowable because of being compliant with Islamic values or is in harmony with perspectives of Islam. For example, the ideas or practices of good governance, excellence, professional competency and integrity, as long as those ideas, values, practices or institutions (many of which could be found in non-Muslim personalities, organizations, cultures or countries) do not conflict with or contradict the belief system, the law or the ethics of Islam" (Mohd Kamal Hassan, 2013: 37).
2. The term "Islamicisation" of human knowledge, carries the essence of inclusiveness to incorporate whatever is permissible by Islamic standards, regardless of coming from either the West or the East.

3. The term “Islamicisation” widens the scope of Islamicity as well as embraces all products of human knowledge, science and technology which are in harmony with the values and norms of Islam.
4. The use of the term “Islamicisation” will be conducive to removing the unjustified observations or misunderstandings of the project of “IOK” as one of the manifestations of Muslim Westophobia or preconception against the West.

### **Role and scope of laymen in the IOHK**

Who can carry out the responsibility of IOHK? According to Kamal Hassan, everybody can participate in the process of Islamicisation of Human Knowledge, and by that he meant every member of the academic staff in the Islamic university irrespective of their academic disciplines. He argues that many of the academic staff may not have a sound Islamic knowledge background, and so they may feel that they are ill-equipped in Islamization of their own disciplines. However, Kamal Hassan believes that they still can be part of the IOHK process. He argues the possibility through classifying and categorizing the range of IOHK activities. Kamal Hassan has offered four categories of “necessity” and 21 types of IOHK efforts (Mohd Kamal Hassan, 2013: 37-44). The four categories are: a) Low necessity; b) Medium necessity; c) High necessity; and d) Highest necessity.

The first category involves a person performing the normal academic activities other than Islamization, because the person does not have the background. Yet the person has the potential to change eventually, that is the least or lowest necessity. For instance, there are people who may not know the Quran very well, but they are critical about the conventional perspectives which are not in harmony with Islamic principles, and they can bring that about within their debates in their classrooms (Interview, 2014).

The next category is called medium necessity where someone is teaching, and may be comparing the Islamic with the non-Islamic, still he/she is not making the real changes in the disciplines. However, at least when it comes to teaching, the person compares and may have the desire to bring about the Islamic perspectives later on. Then the third category is called high necessity which is the more desirable stage where the promotion of the Islamic perspective in teaching and research would be actively undertaken. In this stage, one should be able to promote Islamic perspectives, by referring to the Qur'an, the Sunnah, the *Turath* (Islamic intellectual heritage) and getting assistance from the university and from those involved in Islamization. The last category is called the highest necessity where the Islamiser will become innovative and reconstruct his/her discipline

based on Islamic principles, so that it would become novel knowledge, with new constructions, different approaches, original discoveries, first-hand innovations, all made on the basis of Islamic values, principles and worldview.

According to Kamal Hassan, the four levels of necessities are not fixed, rather they accommodate inter-level mobility. Since “Islamicization” is a continuous process towards upward enhancement of knowledge, no one remains stuck at any given level. As such scholars contributing at the bottom levels gradually move to the higher levels of necessities. In this way, everyone becomes part of IOHK process. Kamal Hassan emphasises that being a layman cannot be an excuse for a Muslim academic. Because moving higher in intellectual and spiritual stages should be the goal of every Muslim. In other words it is a progressive evolution rather than just an imposition. However, the progress must be in accordance with proper manner. This is because there is gradation in the level of Islamicity. An ordinary act of Islamic practice is Islamic on its face value, but such act can have deep spiritual and devotional stages as well. For instance, the Hadith Jibril mentions four stages of Islam – *Shahadah*, *Iman*, *Islam* and *Ihsan*. According to this hadith, verbal utterance (*shahadah*) is Islamic on face value compared to *Ihsan* which is also Islamic but of the highest level of devotion. So one can progress from one level to another and that is why there is no room for excuse that one cannot practice Islamicisation due to low or no knowledge of Islam (Interview, 2014).

How the laymen should proceed to Islamicisation? Kamal Hassan has outlined the process. He said that it is reasonable to believe that for the common people, and the laymen, even the lowest level of involvement will not be easy because they are not from the academia and they do not understand the problems of Western knowledge or the knowledge in the social sciences or humanities because they do not study those at their particular universities. So they are not in a position to understand and bring about Islamic changes. What they should do is to try to improve their knowledge of the Qur'an, Sunnah, *sirah* (Prophet's biography) and Islamic civilisation. In the Malaysian context, people have access to television series which are based on Islamic themes; they also have institutions providing Islamic knowledge like IKIM (Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia) or Institute of Islamic understanding, JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia) or Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, the Religious department in the Prime Minister's Department, and Selangor Religious Affairs Counsel. Furthermore, there are many Muslim NGOs and websites where they can get the



necessary help. In other words, even the laymen can get access to the knowledge of Islam easily in the contemporary times. For the laymen, to make efforts to gain knowledge and understanding of the teachings and principles of Islam would be considered as part of their involvement in the process of Islamicization (Interview, 2014).

### **“Islamicization” of the self**

Kamal Hassan draws attention to another important aspect of IOHK, which is related to the character and attitude of the Islamiser or the Muslim scholar; he calls it “Islamicization of the self.” It signifies the enhancement of the character, attitude and work morals of the students, scholars and administrative staffs of the university based on the teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. He stresses the inseparability of IOHK from the Islamicisation of the self in the Islamic perspective.

He also calls for actions to facilitate the recovery from the “diseases of the heart,” such as the love for the world, greed, envy, rancour, ostentation, seeking human recognition or status, arrogance, pride, egoism, self-glorification, conceit, and self-delusion etc. For him, the way of defining the “Islamicisation” of the human knowledge is not quite the same as some people tend to believe. While their focus is more on knowledge of the disciplines; they end up forgetting about the self, the key essence of the man. In the view of Kamal Hassan, Islamicisation begins from the personality and the character of the academician. Therefore, dealing with the Islamicisation of Human Knowledge involves both academic as a person and academic as a discipline. In this way, it is an integrative and simultaneous process of Islamicisation of the self and Islamicisation of the Human knowledge. In other words, the process of self improvement spiritually, intellectually should be considered as part of Islamicisation of human knowledge. The knowledge and wisdom from Allah (SWT) and from Prophet (SAW) are two sources of infallible knowledge by which human beings can improve themselves to become better servants of Allah (SWT). Even the laymen cannot deny the responsibility because the concept Islamicisation of Human knowledge includes the Islamicisation of the self.

### **“Islamicisation” of comprehensive development**

Kamal Hassan argues that there is an intimate connection between the IOHK and the material development of Muslim countries. The development here refers to all

efforts to improve the condition of Muslim society - economically, politically, socially, culturally, educationally, scientifically and technologically. The concept of development that has been applied in Muslim countries is a Western concept which does not really integrate the factors of morality, ethics, spirituality and faith. Man, from the Islamic point of view, is not just a combination of mind and the material body but he has another inner personality which is the soul. Therefore, the spiritual needs of men will have to be addressed properly. Development in the conventional material sense, does not address the spiritual needs. It focuses only on the material needs though these are very important. But because of its secular worldview, not much attention is given to the spiritual development of man. So, Islamicisation of human knowledge, when it is applied to the concept of development, is concerned equally with the development of a holistic person that represents the unity of body, soul and mind along with the material enhancements (Interview, 2014).

### **Universal perspective of IOHK**

Kamal Hassan asserts that IOHK is essentially a universal project or concern. As far as human reason (‘*aql*’) is concerned, it is created and given to man by Allah (SWT) as a Divine Trust (*amanah*). Since it is essential to believe that human reason is a God-given trust, then the next question is “how do we use that trust”? The answer is that it should be used in a way that the Creator wants it to be used. In other words, it should be used for *ihya* not *ifsad*, for goodness instead of evil, for *khayr* not for *sharr*, for *ma’ruf* not for *munkar*. Human knowledge which is not integrated with *iman* or whose reason is divorced from divine guidance can also produce knowledge which can be harmful for people. It is conspicuous in today’s world where the absence of these divine principles in the development of human knowledge has led to many crises in the scientific, technological, environmental, social, economic, political and moral arenas. The reason for those crises being that human reasoning has been divorced from divine values and wisdom. In order to overcome these crises in the world, it is highly necessary to bring human reasoning into harmony with the divine values and norms, with God’s will. From this perspective, “Islamicisation” is a universal movement.

Even though Islamization of human knowledge has focused so far on developing academic disciplines, writing textbooks, reforming Muslim educational institutions and producing Islamic intellectuals, it should not stop at the Muslim boundary alone. It has to go beyond the barriers to make it

understandable and acceptable to the people of different backgrounds. To bring the human mind back to the will of God varies from one religious community to another. How one community defines God does not necessarily have to be the same as *tawhid*. In the case of Islam, it is quite clear that there is the combination of *shari'ah*, the *aqidah* and the *akhlaq*. This holistic knowledge should be promoted through IOK. There are religions which may think that God is not interested in this kind of knowledge reformation, so they may not be able to appreciate this. However, efforts should be made to convince others that the human mind is a Divine trust from God, and that trust has to be used as an *amanah* from Allah (SWT). Therefore, IOHK concern is not exclusivist but a universal movement (Interview, 2014).

## Conclusion

Islamization of Knowledge (IOK) has been an intellectual movement over the past few decades to reorient the pattern of thoughts and actions of the Muslim Ummah from secular to Islamic knowledge and civilization. Different experts on IOK have conceptualized the term in many ways putting emphasis on different issues. This article has analyzed the term as has been conceptualized by Kamal Hassan, a renowned personality who has remained involved in the movement since its modern origin.

Kamal Hassan believes that it should be read as "Islamicization" instead of Islamization, because the former is all-inclusive - internal personal development of the Muslim intellectual according to the divine knowledge, and his contribution to Islamize human knowledge. Secondly, "Islamicization" is a movement in which academics of all levels can take part with different capacity, but they are under obligation to improve and upgrade their knowledge and capability to a higher level. And finally, "Islamicization" is not an exclusive movement for the Muslims alone, it is rather a universal movement to propagate the idea that secular knowledge is not final, rather an integrated knowledge of human and divine sources can bring more meaningful development in life.

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