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IMPACT OF ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ON PRESERVING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY – THE CASE OF MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN¹

Sažetak

Ovaj **članak** se prvenstveno fokusira na uticaj islamskih obrazovnih institucija na očuvanje islamskog identiteta i nastoji analizirati različite probleme i poteškoće u islamskim obrazovnim institucijama. Posebno, cilj ovog rada je da proceni iskustvo islamskih obrazovnih institucija u Velikoj Britaniji i probleme u ovim obrazovnim institucijama - kao i da istraži neke od mogućih načina za prevazilaženje tih teškoća. Pokazat će se da su obrazovne institucije osnova muslimanskog identiteta u Britaniji. Istaknut ćemo neke od obrazovnih problema muslimanske zajednice kako bismo poboljšali kvalitet obrazovanja u cilju očuvanja vjerskog identiteta. Jedan od glavnih problema, a možda i glavni problem muslimanskih zajednica je očuvanje islamskog identiteta i uspostavljanje održivog islamskog obrazovanja u svjetlu religijskog i multikulturalnog konteksta na Zapadu. Važno je prepoznati različitu prirodu muslimanskih zajednica u ovom spektru. Muslimanske zajednice koje žive na Zapadu čine različite kulturne, sektaške i etničke pripadnosti. Ova raznolikost i fluidnost treba da nas upozore u pokušaju da pronađemo jednu specifičnu ili statičku definiciju "muslimanske zajednice" ili islamskog identiteta. U isto vreme, teško je uhvatiti jednu ideju ili definiciju onoga što čini "zapad", ili "zapadnu civilizaciju". Moramo priznati raznovrsnu i pluralističku dimenziju zapadne civilizacije, ili kulture, sa svojim dinamičnim silama koje proizlaze iz različitih istorijskih faktora i iskustava. Dakle, uspon i ideja sekularizma mogu imati različite forme u različitim evropskim zemljama. Iako je smatrana sekularnom demokratijom, UK ima uspostavljenu crkvu. Francuska, s druge strane, nema ustanovljenu crkvu i ne postoje državne odredbe za vjerske aktivnosti.

Abstract

¹ Ovaj rad je deo postdoktorskog istraživanja koji je autor obavio na Markfield Institute of Higher Education in association with Gloucestershire University-Lester (Engleska) 2010.godine pod naslovom **Impact of Islamic Educational Institutions on Preserving Religious Identity – The Case of Muslim Community in Serbia and Britain** a pod mentorstvom dr. Abdulaha Šahina.

This research focuses primarily on the impact of Islamic educational institutions on preserving Islamic identity, and seeks to analyze various problems and difficulties encountered in Islamic educational institutions. In particular, our aim is to evaluate the experience of the Islamic educational institutions in Britain, and number of related problems encountered in these educational institutions—as well as explore some possible ways in overcoming these difficulties. It will be shown that the educational institutions are basis of Muslims identity in Britain. We will highlight some of educational concerns of the Muslim community, and the problems encountered in attempting to overcome them in order to improve the quality of education for the sake of preserving religious identity. Hopefully, it will contribute to the current debate about the role of Islamic education in preserving Islamic identity and its influence on Muslim's life to produce the desired positive impact in the community for better life.

One of the major problems, and arguably the main problem, facing Muslim communities is the preservation of Islamic identity and establishing a viable Islamic education in light of the religious and multicultural landscape in the West. Before we proceed further into the discussion, it is important to recognize one initial problem in attempting to spell out the diverse nature Muslim communities and the West. It is important to recognize the diverse nature of Muslim communities across this spectrum. Muslim communities living in the West comprises of different cultural, sectarian and ethnic backgrounds—arriving in different countries, for different purposes and different periods in history. This diversity and fluidity ought to caution us in attempting to locate one specific or static definition—or identity—of “Muslim community” or Islamic identity. At the same time, it is difficult to capture one idea or definition of what constitutes “West,” or for that matter Western civilization. We ought to recognize the diverse and pluralistic dimension of the Western civilization, or culture, with its own dynamic forces stemming from diverse historical factors and experiences. Thus, the rise and the idea of secularism may take a different form in various European countries. Though considered a secular democracy, UK has an established church. France, on the other hand, does not have an established church and there are not state provisions for religious activities.²

Given the very nature of this diversity and fluidity of Muslim communities in the West and the West itself, and Europe in particular, the very

² I owe this point to Dr. Abdullah Shahin for pointing out this major difference.

question of Islamic identity and Islamic education in European context becomes acute. Moreover, the processes of globalisation, modernity, and mass migration have brought diverse cultures closer than ever before. In his essay on the Islamic education, Abdullah Sahin argues that our expression of Islamic identity through Islamic education ought to take into consideration the presence and recognition of others, in which our values are always in dialogue and informed by others. For Sahin, the formation of Islamic identity through Islamic education is a continuous learning process, cherishing an open and critical attitude of ourselves and others. Basing himself on the Qur'anic injunctions and lessons from Islamic history, Sahin draws our attention to this open-ended process of Islamic education.³ This model of self-critical awareness and others becomes highly relevant when we take a closer look at the response of British Muslims in attempting to preserve and construe their religious values.

Islamic educational institutions play an essential role in preserving Islamic identity, values, and particularly—it preserves family values in the society by keeping a healthy relation between individuals and groups. Given the prominent role of the Islamic educational institutions and its exerted influence in all aspects of life, it is therefore quintessential in evaluating the Islamic educational institutions and their role in preserving Islamic identity. In societies where Muslims constitute a minority—in Britain—the importance of such institutions becomes apparent.

The background of British Muslims differs in some respects. They mainly come from Asian and Arabic countries, as well as from some European countries. Each of those countries has some specific habits, culture, and local peculiarities. This variety affects life of Muslims in Britain, creating complexity, which we will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

1. Islamic Identity and Islamic Education in Britain: Challenges and Prospects

1.1. First wave of immigrations

In order to understand the attitude of behaviour patterns of British-born Muslim children, and concerns of their parents, it is important to highlight the historical background of migration of Muslims into Brit-

³ Abdullah Sahin, "The contribution of religious education to social and community cohesion: an Islamic educational perspective", in *Religious education and Social and Community cohesion*, ed. Michael Grimmitt (McCrimmons Press, 2010).

ain.

Muslim presence in Britain goes back at least three hundred years to the activities of the East India Company, when men from Indian subcontinent were first recruited into the merchant navy.⁴ These sailors, known 'kascars', were present in Britain's ports in sizeable numbers.⁵ Since entry into Britain for citizens of British colonies was not restricted by 1962 the immigrants came from India in 1940s after Second World War. Before British authorities issued a legislative proposition of entry into the country (Immigration Act of 1962) there was a massive increase in immigration from all regions, especially from the Indian subcontinent.⁶ Next Muslim group of different background, Turkish, settled in Britain in 1970s. It was followed by smaller groups from Malaysia, Morocco and Yemen.⁷ European Muslims from Bosnia and Kosovo as well as from Afghanistan and Somalia came to Britain in 1990s. Until 2001, a comprehensive data on British Muslims were not available. According to the 2001 census, British Muslim population numbered 1.6. Million, making up 2.7 percent of total British population, and is considered second-largest religion in Britain.⁸

1.2. Islamic Educational institutions in Britain

Many of the Muslim immigrants came in Britain for variety of reasons—some as refugees, some for a better standard of living, others to get education. Although the first mosque was erected in Woking in 1890,⁹ the number of mosques increased significantly with new phases of immigrants in Britain in the 1950s.¹⁰

It is unclear when supplementary schools first appeared. What is known, however, is that the supplementary school "movement" started flourishing after the Second World War, when refugees from Eastern Eu-

⁴ Ziauddin Sardar, "Racism, Identity and Muslims in the West", in *Muslim Minorities in the West*, ed. Syed Z. Abedin, Ziauddin Sardar, (London: Grey Seal, 1995), 1.

⁵ Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain-religion, politics and identity among British Muslims* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1994), 11.

⁶ Muhammad Anwar, *Young Muslims in Britain-attitudes, educational needs and policy implications* (Leicester: The Islamic foundation, 1994), 12.

⁷ Jorgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 41-42.

⁸ Ceri Peach, "Britain's Muslim population: Overview", in *Muslim Britain: Communities under pressure*, ed. Tahir Abas, (London, New York: Zed Books, 2005), 18.

⁹ Muhammad Anwar, *Young Muslims in Britain-attitudes, educational needs and policy implications* (Leicester: The Islamic foundation, 1994), 12. Britain has no generally applicable legal framework for religious communities. Traditional religious communities have historical privileges, but there some statutory limits for their freedom. However, status of recognition, like in Austria for example, does not exist in Britain. Most Muslim organization and mosques operate under law that regulates charitable organizations. That means that all mosques and organizations are registered charities. Other than that, technically, organizations are not required to be registered.

¹⁰ Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West – Islamic Movements in America and Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 97.

rope arrived in the UK. This growth continued in the 1960s, when immigrants from new Commonwealth countries set up their own community schools. It has accelerated again as new communities continue to arrive in Britain. Many such supplementary schools are held in mosques, in community centres, church halls, school halls hired for use, or private homes. They study Arabic language for purpose of Qur'anic recitation, and they also study principals of beliefs and basic requirements of Shari'a.¹¹ One of the main reasons, why Muslims have established a programme of supplementary schools—madrasas—is because parents thought that the state schools fail to provide an essential part of spiritual and moral education. Other reasons include the absence of Arabic and other relevant community languages from the school curriculum.¹²

Nowadays, there are two types of Muslim schools in Britain: state funded and independent Muslim schools. State-funded Muslim schools are required to teach the National Curriculum, but they are free to teach their own syllabus for religious education. Independent Muslim schools combine traditional Islamic religious education, based on models from the Indian sub-continent, with some mainstream English National Curriculum subjects. However, there is great diversity among Muslim schools in Britain. For instance, they vary in student numbers from approximately 5 to 1800. They also differ in terms of the curriculum they teach: all state funded and some independent Muslim schools follow the national curriculum, while a small number of independent schools teach an entirely Islamic curriculum. These tend to be Islamic seminaries or daru-l-ulum, which are training their students to be Islamic scholars.¹³

The struggle to obtain government funding for Muslim schools spans for pretty long time, as applications were repeatedly turned down. For example, Muslim parents Association in Bradford in 1982 sought five schools with majority of Muslim students to be moved into voluntary aided schools under Muslim control. The initiative was rejected with argument that type of schools like that would inevitably lead to social segregation and poor quality of the education.

When the Education Reform Act was adopted in 1988, for the first time it has become a statutory duty for country schools with Muslim stu-

¹¹ Ghulam Sarwar, *British Muslims and Schools*, (London, The Muslim Educational Trust, 1994), 28.

¹² Muhammad Akram Khan-Cheema, "British Muslims in State schools: a positive way forward", in *Issues in Islamic education*, ed. The Muslim Education Trust, (London: Cromwell Press Limited, 1996), 84.

¹³ Parker-Jenkins, M., "The Legal Framework for Faith-based Schools and the Rights of the Child", in Gardner, R. et al. (eds.) *Faith Schools: consensus or conflict?*, (Abingdon: Routledge Falmer, 2005),

dents to include the teaching of Islam in their RE programmes.¹⁴ The new Education Act adopted in 1993 contained provision for the government support of schools formed by voluntary groups. The door therefore appeared to be open for Muslim schools to receive state finance. About 500.000 Muslim children are currently receiving education in British schools.¹⁵ Only one per cent of all Muslim children are home schooled.¹⁶ However, vast majority of Muslims children attend three kinds of schools: community schools, churches schools or Muslims schools.

Generally, in the UK, children are required to attend school between ages of 5 and 16. Under the Human Rights Act (1998) schools are required to adhere to requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights, such as the right to freedom of religion, the right of parents to schooling their children, in the line with their religious and philosophical beliefs, and protection the children from discrimination on the ground of religion.¹⁷

1.3. Challenges for the Islamic education in Britain

From the time globalization set in as a social force, religious identity has gone through unique changes. The most important change was religious society found it facing other institutions totally detached from religious belief that offered new sciences devoid of all religious inclinations. To understand the depth of this change, we need to understand the meaning of secularization, multifaceted process of social change through which religious thinking; practice and institutions lose their social significance. The process of secularization began with the Enlightenment in the West. It became a strong counterforce to the moral dominance of religious orientations. One of the consequences of the process of secularization alongside globalization has been reflected in the fragmentation of religious identity.¹⁸

Before proceeding to more specific discussion on religious identity of Muslims in UK it is necessary to consider the general context in the countries of origin. Muslim communities bring with them to Britain a complex of perception about the norms of family life and the undisputed roots.

¹⁴ Ghulam Nabi Saqeb, "Teacher training in Islam: its importance and practicalities", in *Issues in Islamic education*, ed. The Muslim Education Trust, (London: Cromwell Press Limited, 1996), 35.

¹⁵ www.statistics.gov.uk/focuson/religion

¹⁶ www.islamichomeeducation.co.uk

¹⁷ European Convention Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) art. 9 and 14, and Additional Protocol no 1 to the ECHR, art.2.

¹⁸ Seid Reza Ameli, *Globalization, Americanization and British Muslim Identity* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2002), 109.

They brought with them a cultural heritage and customs.¹⁹ All groups who migrate to a new country have difficulties adjusting to a new way of life. Strongly attached to their own religion and culture they feel that Western culture is a threat to their religion and values, and religion is an important and sensitive part of British Muslims identity. Brought up in a different cultural environment Muslims migrants began to experience tensions between minority-majority culture. These tensions strongly influence the attitudes towards religion and other values of their own community. Adapting to the new circumstances and culture becomes a major obstacle for these newly formed communities in Britain. This raises a number of important and related questions pertaining to their identity of Muslims living in Britain. As Claire Tinker points out,

“Given these diverse national origins it is unsurprising that a number of questions have arisen about how Muslims in Britain construct and maintain their identities.

In particular, do they adopt multiple or overlapping identities, or do they privilege one aspect of their identity over others? Do ‘British Muslims’ affiliate themselves to the British State, to a British or European Muslim community, or to a global Ummah?”²⁰

One of the main challenges for British Muslims is how to preserve their Islamic identity in British society, and what this Muslim Britishness means, or can we speak of multiple identities?²¹ British Muslims are grappling with the question of how to be Muslim in secular state and to find proper mechanism to live as a minority in non-Muslim society. In addition, they are supposed to find appropriate way whereby they will reconcile values of Islam and living in secular state.

For early Muslim immigrants preserving a religious identity became a major concern, and they sought to preserve their religious identity by educating and upbringing their children in accordance with Islamic teaching. In order to achieve that, first Muslim erected first mosques in Britain. The structure of mosque and madrasas played key role in the first decades of Muslims settlements. The first serious Islamic educational need appeared to have been felt by the first generation when they were joined by their families and children. Consequently, they expended realm

¹⁹ Maurice Irfan Coloos, *Education and Islam – a new strategic approach* (Leicester: SDSA, 2004), 13.

²⁰ Claire Tinker, “*State Funded Muslim Schools? Equality, Identity and Community in Multi-faith Britain*,” Ph.D dissertation (University of Nottingham, 2006), 12.

²¹ Paul Bagguley, Yasmin Hussain, “Flying the flag for England? Citizenship, religion and cultural identity among British Pakistani Muslims”, in *Muslim Britain: Communities under pressure*, ed. Tahir Abas, (London, New York: Zed Books, 2005), 217.

of interaction with surrounding society particularly in education.²² That interaction raised deeper questions, challenges and issues which relate to individual and collective senses of identity. When the first children from Muslim families arrived in the British educational system in the late 1960s, Muslims found themselves facing a sizeable cultural challenge: what would be the consequences of social cohesion of these children within open society where they would meet children of own age from different cultural and religious background. Was there not a risk that Islamic identity would be adulterated and eroded through contact with the dominant non-Muslim society?²³

Very often, children meet quite different values in school from those that they usually meet at home. These lead children to face problems adapting to life both in school and at home. How they will deal with food restrictions, the question of dress, physical education and special problems met by girls in the religious context are the crucial questions. Similarly, Education Reforms Act 1988 aroused concerns of Muslims.²⁴ Muslim parents were worried regarding appropriation of Christian Assembly in Religious education. They could only avoid it by writing an explicit disapproval to the head teachers stating that they do not wish their children to attend these services as well as Christian Religious Education. Parents were worried because of the lack of facilities in schools to teach them their religion and culture.

Single-sex schooling has also been part of the appeal for Muslim schools. In Bradford, the Muslim Parents Association was formed in 1974 to represent the Muslim view on this issue and from this time a number of private Muslim schools were founded along single-sex lines and in accordance with Islamic principles. Muslim schools for boys have been established to accommodate the wishes of Muslim communities who have expressed a need for single-sex schooling for their sons as well as their daughters. In the absence of schools promoting an Islamic faith, Muslim parents have opted for alternative denominational schools, such as those run on Anglican or Catholic lines, which are seen to be supportive of both moral education and single-sex schooling.

When the Government has taken the lead on many issues relating to the needs of the children from Muslim and other minority group the

²² Jorgen Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 118.

²³ Gilles Kepel, *Allah in the West – Islamic Movements in America and Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 109.

²⁴ Muhammad Anwar, *Young Muslims in Britain: Attitudes, educational needs and policy implications* (Leicester: The Islamic foundation, 1994), 30.

response to specific religious needs has been largely left to local government. The reason for this is that Local Education Authorities (LEAs) are clearly in better position to identify the religious needs of children. Practices adopted by LEA in response to Muslims requests include: provision of a room for midday prayer and special provision for Friday prayer, adoption of school uniform rules and sportswear requirements, the use of discretionary holidays to allow Muslim children permission to be away from school at the start of Ramadan and at 'Eid al-Fitr and 'Eid al-Adha, the provision of halal food for school lunch, single-sex groupings and classes and other schools activities.

Majority of Muslims parent support single-sex schooling for their daughters after puberty. There are greater opportunities for boys to harass girls verbally and physically in mixed schools. Muslims parents are increasingly using these arguments to support their preference for single-sex schooling. Muslim children are exposed to divergent values at school and at mosque school.

In terms of educational planning, some community schools attempt to keep religion and faith out of schools altogether, and this makes it more difficult for them to meet distinctive moral, spiritual and cultural needs of Muslim children.²⁵ The result is that Muslim children's unique religious identity may not be celebrated in schools, leading to feelings that this identity is also not valued in broader society. At the same time, there is a concern of the teasing and bullying that Muslim children experience at schools. In one incident, a schoolgirl had her headscarf pulled off by woman at her school gates while in other verbal abuse and threat is recorded. The school curriculum has important contribution to make in helping students to develop an understanding of different groups within their society. Schools have responsibility to check the accuracy of representation of Islam in the textbooks and library books they use. In the school, Islam can be taught by non-Muslims, but they often have limited understanding of issues pertaining to the needs of Muslim community.²⁶

Many parents would like their children to have opportunity to receive lessons about Islam within community schools, as a part of normal school day, preferably taught by imam or qualified Muslim teacher. In State schools, students are required to take part in daily collective worship, which can be considered in broad sense as Christian in character.²⁷ Above

²⁵ Open Society Institute, *British Muslims and Education* (2005), 145.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 152.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 159.

all, teachers should be trained to meet the needs of Muslim children and to respond sensitively to Muslim beliefs and values in, and beyond, the classroom. It is important teachers to respect Muslim children's identity and avoid stereotypes about Islam and Muslims.

Prominence of religion in the identity of young British Muslims is of enormous importance in schools, but it involves complex questions of intercultural relations in multicultural society. The question of assimilation and isolation begin to emerge in this context. One response is to require Muslim children to cast off their cultural heritage (assimilation) while other response is for Muslims to retreat into inner-city enclaves, where they can preserve their identity untouched by the way of life in the broader society around them (isolation). Muslim should prefer a response in which they are both free to develop their distinctive identity and confident to take on all the rights and responsibility of full British citizenship. Here we are moving into the model of integration. Two shifts in curriculum might help to make this happen. The first is more global focus, where European and Christian culture is contextualised in terms of world civilisation. The second involves the inclusion of currently neglected Muslim contribution to European learning and culture. The effect of this would be both to enrich curriculum for all students and to support Muslim children in preservation their identity within the concept of European citizenship, hence that will reduce their feeling of rejection.²⁸

British Muslims have to consider question if they want or not to import pedagogical methods and curricula from the country of origin and to think of a project adapted to the realities of their societies. They should explore the areas with which Islamic education is concerned. Study of the surrounding and of people is an essential part of education. Islamic educational institution can not be disconnected from reality. If things were the same as in the students' countries of origin, the teaching methods would have to take into account the milieu in which the education was given.

State-maintained schools are nurturing in an Islamic environment. At the same time, there is a danger of many of these schools which promote a more isolationist outlook.²⁹ These schools could isolate Muslims from broader society and hinder attempts at integration. They may fail to prepare children adequately for democratic citizenship in multicultural

²⁸ Ibid, 154.

²⁹ Abdullah Sahin, "The contribution of religious education to social and community cohesion: an Islamic educational perspective," 168.

society and understanding of other faiths. Conversely, they nurture faith by teaching religious education, including art, sex education and history, from an Islamic point of view and by providing school ethos that is supportive of faith. They provide appropriate spiritual environment and education which is in accordance with Islamic beliefs and values. They help Muslim children to develop and retain their religious identity. If Muslim children have strong self-concept and sense of identity they will be able to develop respect and tolerance for others and play worthwhile role in increasingly multicultural society.

1.4. Integration in British Multicultural and Secular Society

British multiculturalism provides a fruitful dialogue between different cultures and religions which fosters and encourages diversity and pluralism. Its benefit lies in the recognition of various group identities and particularly the identity of minorities.³⁰ The prospect of celebrating a multicultural attitude in Britain has been hampered by Rushdie's Satanic Verses Affair (1988) as well as attacks of 9/11 and 7/7—resulted in a more hostile attitude against the Muslims in Britain. The presence of Muslims in British society became clearly visible in the 1980's following the Rushdie affair. At the same time, a sense of alienation from the traditional culture at home and feeling rejected from the wider secular was felt by many young Muslims. Shahin writes,

“During the late 1980's and 1990's growing economic inequality, discrimination, very slow upward mobility coupled with growing Islamophobia have increased this sense of alienation. The British multiculturalism compared to the more openly assimilationist French model appears more accommodating to the religious/cultural demands of ethnic minorities. However more recent developments suggest that both systems are no longer able to contain, let alone properly address, the growing Muslim challenges in Europe.”³¹

Shahin recognizes two major problems arising due to this inadequacy of Muslim integration into the multicultural of Britain. First, it relates to the policy makers who for the most part have focused on the national security in attempting to eradicate terrorism without prioritizing the fundamental socio-economic and educational policy.³² Moreover, there is a tendency on a superficial level to promote “moderate” Muslims in

³⁰ Claire Tinker, “State Funded Muslim Schools? Equality, Identity and Community in Multi-faith Britain,” 206.

³¹ Abdullah Sahin, “Rethinking the Meaning of Being Islamically Educated in a secular Context: Reflections on Religious Nurture among British Muslim Communities”, 2.

³² Ibid, 1.

an attempt to define British Muslims by a political rhetoric. For Shahin, these are short-term goals and do not allow Muslims to empower themselves as well as identify and resolve their own problems.³³ Shahin notes a second major problem which relates to the inaptness of Islamic institutions, lack of necessary skills and method, to engage critically in a wider multicultural society.³⁴

Shahin explores various problems facing Islamic institutions in attempting to engage in a wider multicultural society. One of the main challenges facing Islamic institutions in Britain is the failure of recognition of Islamic institutions by the UK educational authorities. Many of the graduate from the Islamic seminaries are not recognized in a wider secular educational institutions. Shahin recognizes that Islamic institutions ought to rethink the strategies of integrating more fully into the secular educational system.³⁵

Within mosque schools teaching is often provided by local imams, who may be unfamiliar with current educational thinking and who actually have received their training in madrasas in other cultural and religious contexts outside the UK. The need for imams who are trained in the UK, and are able to communicate and interact with young British Muslims, is one of the most important issues for preservation Islamic identity.³⁶ Thereby, they will help Muslim children to preserve religious identity and to articulate Islam in contemporary British society. Britain Muslims should not think that the right response should come from abroad, from great Islamic scholars residing in Muslim countries. It is felt that imams who were trained outside the UK could adversely affect process of perseverance of religious identity and at the same time integration in British society. At the same time, it also relates to the pedagogical and curriculum that is that in these seminaries. Shahin writes,

“It is very concerning that most of the teaching staff and students in the seminaries are not introduced to the generic pedagogic skills necessary to develop a proper knowledge and understanding of Islam and effectively communicate it to the wider society. It appears that no proper provision is made to introduce students to the subjects within the clas-

³³ Abdullah Shahin, “Islam, Secularity and the Culture of Critical Openness A Muslim Theological Reflection”, in *Islam, Society and the State: British Secularism and Religion* ed. Yahya Birt, Dilwar Hussain and Attallah Siddiqui (Markfield: Kube Publishing, 2011), 10.

³⁴ Ibid, 10; Abdullah Sahin, “Rethinking the Meaning of Being Islamicly Educated in a secular Context: Reflections on Religious Nurture among British Muslim Communities,” 4.

³⁵ Ibid, 3.

³⁶ Maurice Irfan Coloës, *Education and Islam – a new strategic approach* (Leicester: SDSA 2004), 12.

sical Islamic humanities (*the adab genre*) and almost no contemporary Western liberal arts subjects are studies. Without proper familiarity with the humanities it is difficult to expect that the students will develop the hermeneutic competence to engage with the rich Muslim cultural heritage and develop a more appropriate and effective language for articulating Islam in contemporary British society.”³⁷

This perception of classical Islamic learning and the wider secular society seems to be inherently incompatible for many Islamic educational institutions, which may explain one of the reasons why many of the Islamic institutions are reluctant to engage in a broader dialogue with culture at large. Shahin, however, challenges this dichotomous view of incompatibility between Islamic values and that of secular ideals. Shahin is careful to differentiate between a) *secularism* “as an ideological position that confines faith strictly to the personal sphere of life, neither reflects the reality of contemporary Western societies nor is compatible with Islam, and b) *secularity* “as a political principal integral to democratic inclusion, may accommodate—in a just manner—the diversity of cultures, value systems and faith traditions that make up modern plural society.”³⁸

Furthermore, Shahin aims to show that the latter, namely a process of *secularity*—is in fact compatible with the principles of Islam. He points out that the ideals of secularity may in fact be sought in the Islamic principles of public or common good (*maslaha*) and in an attempt to delineate and explicate the purposes of Divine Will (*maqasid and ta’lil al-ahkam*) in a modern contemporary society.³⁹ Shahin encourages openness and cultural engagement that was practiced in the medieval Islamic society, which displayed openness and tolerance of various faith communities.

Conclusion

In the introduction we have already alluded to Sahins epistemological framework which involves critical engagement with others. We may push this line of thought in terms integrationist approach, in which— Muslims sought to strive as full and equal members of a multicultural and multi religious Britain, without jeopardizing their religious identity. One way forward is for there to be willingness on part of those in authority to understand the educational needs of British Muslims and meet needs with

³⁷ Abdullah Sahin, “Rethinking the Meaning of Being Islamically Educated in a secular Context: Reflections on Religious Nurture among British Muslim Communities”, 4.

³⁸ Shahin, “Islam, Secularity and the Culture of Critical Openness A Muslim Theological Reflection”, 3.

³⁹ Ibid, 4.

impartiality.⁴⁰ At the same time, there must a self-awareness of Islamic educational institutions to be more inclusive of culture at large.

As noted previously, however, many Islamic educational institutions tend to be more insulated from the wider culture at large. This protective and insulated attitude becomes problematic for many young Muslim students who find it difficult to express themselves in a wider society. The Muslim educational institutions ought to be more inclusive and show an open attitude towards others.

Study of Muslim religious educational institutions suffers from the lack of awareness of the complex of structure and culture at large. It is noted that awareness of Muslims from their arrival in Britain for their religious identity was on quite high level. The dilemma was about their children and young generations that have been born in Britain and thereby they got, besides Islamic identity, British identity and adopted some of British cultural heritage. Thus, a challenge appeared in front of both parents and children. Children were often times in dilemma in how to maintain Islamic identity in non Islamic society in which they were born. Parents were concerned how to pass on to children their perception and values in accordance with new area circumstances but first of all to be in conformity with Islamic teachings.

If faith is the key determinant of Muslim students' lives and identity, the Educational system schools and Higher Education Institutions must take steps to understand more deeply the key components and issues for Muslim students. The presence of Muslim children in multi-religious schools is needed to help the majority ethnic community to be more inclusive. Here, the question of an open attitude and critical dialogical approach on both sides becomes apparent.

The improvement in the Islamic education institution remains vital to the gradual development of the indigenous Muslim religious authority and religious leadership in Britain. If the Muslim community, their so called leaders and DFEE cum LEAs are really serious in raising the standard of education of the Muslim children than fundamental changes have to be made in the British educational system. Muslim children needs state funded Muslim schools for their proper growth and development. They are in a better position to educate them because they understand their needs and demands.

⁴⁰ Ghulam Sarwar, *British Muslims and Schools*, (London, The Muslim Educational Trust, 1994), 30.