An Understanding of Nursi’s Contribution Towards A Worldview-Bound Education for Muslim World

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Abstract: Since a worldview is developed by a natural process from an everyday life continuity of a society (Alparslan, 1996), the social situation of a community has a key role in molding its own worldview. Starting from a context of individual setting, the formation and development of a worldview is influenced by the social setting which is to be interpreted using different methods of understanding. The main focus of this paper would be on giving an outline of how Said Nursi contributed to a worldview-bound education for Muslim world. While analyzing the philosophy and thought of Nursi with special reference to his writings by which the identity of an eminent intellectual figure was and is being established, the paper would be looking into the relation of his educational ideologies with the established worldview which is Islamic in nature. The notion of worldview both from secular and Islamic environment would be analyzed in order for the ‘worldview-bound education’ to be clear. The understanding of Nursi’s contribution is made by philosophically analyzing and interpreting four cases taken from his own writings. The observations obtained from a systematic analysis of these cases would be underpinning the fact that the educational institutions of Islamic world should give better concern on reading Said Nursi’s intellectual contributions to Muslim education system.

Keywords: Bound Education; Muslim Education; Education

Introduction
Looking from a general point of view, we can assert that every society has its own worldview; it is not incorrect to say that every individual has his or her worldview which is formed by the social settings. There are different factors to shape the worldview of an individual as well as a community including the education, religion, language, psychology, and the environment (Alparslan, 1996). The worldview formed in individual or the society, by and large, may not be organized or systematically structured and therefore the concept sometimes is hidden in them without purposefully knowing that this is their worldview on this. This paper, after giving an outline about the concept of worldview in general point of view as well as in its Islamic conception, would be heading towards understanding the contribution of Said Nursi to a worldview-bound education for Muslim world with special reference to his own writings and thoughts. While going through Nursi’s concept of social education, the paper would be choosing analytical method to convey the significance of his contribution towards the worldview-bound education. Said Nursi, no need of an introduction, was a revolutionary icon of his era during the time of instability in the history of mankind and particularly that of Muslim world. The importance of Nursi’s contributions should be highlighted in a sense that he was proposing a reconstructive model of Islamic environment which was stable enough to compete with modern secular philosophies. Therefore, it a high need of the present Muslim world to do a systematic interpretation of his contributions to Muslim community, specifically looking into their educational field; and this paper is hoped to be a first step to start with this intention.

Defining the worldview
According to Vidal (2008), the term ‘worldview’ is often used to emphasize the personal and historical point of view. He holds the view that the worldview is a form of philosophy. That is to say when we use the term we refer to a different form of philosophy.

Alparslan (1996) gives various interpretations for the concept of worldview in his book named ‘Islamic Science towards a Definition’. He points out that it refers to ‘a conceptual totality as an attempt to grasp the universe, and as such a worldview is an architeconic whole, in which notions, ideas, and beliefs are so interconnected that together they form a network of organized concepts’ (p.13). In this context he opines that it is related to the idea of understanding the universe as a whole and all the mentioned entities are connected with each other. The formation of worldview then occurs naturally. He continues by revealing that a worldview is an architeconic network of ideas, conceptions, aspirations and beliefs in which all these entities are coherently organized but not necessarily in a systematic manner.

Berghout (n.d.) says that generally a worldview may be defined as an individual’s or group’s contemplation, perception or concept of world; a view or philosophy of life. Here, as we are discussing the worldview from a Muslim perspective, it is inevitable to know what the

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Islamic concept of worldview implies. By his own definition, 'Islamic worldview is the collective ummatic vision of existence through which Muslims interpret and provide answers to the ultimate questions about the Creator, the existence of what is seen and unseen, the universe, life, humanity, prophethood, vicegerency, society, history, and the Hereafter' (p.24). We can see the same categorization in the chapter mentioning the Qur'anic worldview in his book ‘God and Man in the Qur’an’ by Izutsu. Whenever we name a discipline as ‘Islamic’ the cardinal aspect which should be noticed is that it should be formed and constructed from the framework of Islamic worldview.

But, there is lack of studies on the development of worldview studies from both a historical and a conceptual perspective within the Islamic context. As a matter of fact, no specific area of disciplines deals mainly with the history of worldview research as well as its conceptual construction and development from an Islamic perspective (Berghout, n.d.). In the scripture of Islam, we cannot see any specific discipline which is called ‘worldview studies’. Nevertheless there are certain indicators showing the philosophy of the religion on different matters.

If this is the case with the studies on Islamic worldview, then, no need to mention, there is big dearth in literature pertaining to the worldview-bound education with reference to Nursi’s contribution. Although many studies have been conducted on Said Nursi and his intellectual reformation, ideology, philosophy etc. there is not a single study analyzing or even conceptualizing his contribution to Muslim educational world, specifically defining and focusing on worldview bounded education. In fact, his thoughts and reflections are the ideal ways to understand comprehensively the educational identity of a Muslim. That is why this paper tries to have a peripheral look to the notion of worldview-bound education in its general conception at first, and then Nursi’s contributions to the Islamic educational system.

What is meant by a worldview-bound educational system?

From the above mentioned discussion of worldview, it is clear that the worldview, for an individual is something important. For a Muslim it is connected with his whole existence rooted in spirit and soul which are to be nurtured (tarbiyah and ta’deeb in general connotation of the terms) through proper education. When he is actively involved in the process of educating the soul and spirit, it is widened to another aspect which can be called as a worldview-bound education in its Islamic sense. Here it is inevitable to explain the tabiyah process with an established framework of Islamic worldview to be clearer on the notion.

The reason why the God almighty used the term rabb, from which the term murabbi derives, when he narrates Adam in his critical condition as he was supposed to live out of heaven, may be to implicitly indicate the human need for a murabbi to nourish him through education that he wanted to get. The Qur’anic verse (20:121) can be interpreted with a spiritual dimension looking to this aspect. The self narrative of Adam was in a condition which he needed the murabbi who could lead him into the historical and moral existence of humanity. Then the first part of tarbiyah was done by Allah and here the issue begins. If tarbiyah is not something that is understood today relating it with all kinds of education, we ought to think about the philosophy of being the giver of something more than the education, and how this position can be understood standing at the level of a human. It is impossible to interpret the ‘God’ of a Muslim with his understanding of him as murabbi to everyone. Therefore, for a Muslim, he has to be placed in various situations which could help him to think differently in terms of finding the ways of understanding without going beyond the limitations that he has. We have been discussing the educational related matters since decades and centuries and trying to find new ways of grasping and interpreting the knowledge according to our cognition. In the world of globalization of education, education has been the most ‘popular’ newsmaker regardless of region or season. The universality of educational institutions including nurseries, schools, colleges and universities has been a thing of discussion being they are in a road of ongoing effort to be different from others, not in terms of the real educational excellence but the creative ways of educational marketing. At the moment all these institutions are competing in the open market to get the customers i.e. the students and institution community including parents, outsiders etc. “in the market discourse, education is seen as a good or commodity, and moral issues and moral training are neglected ” (Daun & Walford, 2004).

The relevance of a worldview-bound education becomes undeniable in this aspect. Islam defines education as a process of disciplining the human physically and spiritually, not merely to make a good citizen of the state but all in all to make a pure man which is al-insan al kamil. To fulfill this objective, he has to have many prerequisites which help him head to the real goal. In this case the human being is in an immense need of an established framework with an established worldview which we believe as Islamic worldview. From here afterwards, the author will be using the term ‘worldview-bound’ referring to an ‘Islamic or religious worldview-bound’ to assert that even

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1 This is an extract from a work by the present author co-authored by Ibrahim, B. published in 2013.
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though there are many worldviews which are not necessarily bound with any knowledge structure or system of education, the worldview about which we are discussing is always bound with the whole existence of humanity and that is what we believe as Islamic worldview. So education, in Islam should always be connected with our worldview. The formation of educational system in Islam is to be bound with this worldview.

When we go deeper into the formation structure of our worldview, we should begin with the concept of tawhid, the oneness of God. The whole framework of Islamic worldview is surrounded with tawhidic dimensions. As we mentioned, the worldview formation occurs from our living environment, psychology, language etc. then looking into formation of our tawhidic worldview formation, it is clear that it is a result of the environment which was purposefully created by the only One God. From him we got a connection to proponent of this worldview which is Prophet Muhammad upon whom be peace. This connection at its first sight was fully psychological in nature. It was the Prophet who introduced a new language, the language of Qur’an to the whole world. Reading Izutsu (2002), we can get a clear idea on how the language was a key entity to the formation of our worldview. In Arabia, the complete way of life then was changed into a worldview-bounded environment at the time of Prophet whose followers tried to maintain the same up to decades. The cultural aspects of Arabia clearly denote this change by many examples.

The most ‘celebrated’ golden periods of Islam after the Prophetic era were the result of the aforementioned worldview-bound education system, which derived from a knowledge structure within Islamic worldview. By understanding the formation of Islamic science we reach to a conclusion that Islamic worldview development was not result of any ‘translation process’ which is still thought by many historians as they assume that the Greek sciences were enormously translated to Islam and therefore the structure of knowledge within Islam found its way. Islamic knowledge structure was in a regular movement after the Prophet upon whom be peace came with a revelation, and it was not a transformed entity from any other previous civilization. That is why our worldview of knowledge and education differs from others.

How to Understand Nurani’s Contribution to a Worldview-Bound Education for Muslim world?

As is known the period when Said Nurani lived was a phase of hustles and bustles in the world history as well as in Islamic world. The aftermath of Second World War brought a significant change in all dimensions especially in education. When we observe these changes in educational system we get clear picture on Nurani was encouraged to build a university with he wanted to proclaim an integration of religious and secular knowledge. The tradition of learning as an identity of a true Muslim was evidently convinced to Nurani and with his own life experience he planned an educational system for Muslim world with which he dreamt of an ideal Muslim society. So, in order to understand about Nurani’s contribution to a worldview-bound education for the Muslim world we have to categorize our observations into certain cases of which the first one will be the historical background of educational planning done by the educationist during his time. The second case to analyze is the case of Nurani as an advocate of true happiness by knowledge and love of God, which is the bedrock of Islamic worldview frame.

Case 1: Method of Educational Planning System and Nurani’s Concern of a University

Here, we will be analyzing the reason why Nurani thought of an institutionalized version of education at the time he was fully concentrating on making the leaders of the future with a traditional way of individualized education. The system of education was devoid of any complexities during pre-Second World War era. And also the education system was not a total concern of the nation, being the quantity as well as the quality of the institutions were comparatively within certain limits. In addition, the advancement of education, technology and other changes of the world were at a slower terrain. In this sense, the organizational risks and the social challenges in terms of its educational arrangements seemed to be very low at all part of the world.\(^2\) It can be thought that the public community and the external environment of organizations at the time of pre-War era were ‘silent’ to an extent without any serious problem toward the then organizational system; hence is the absence of the institutional strategy, mission and vision, philosophy, administration etc. to be viewed.

So it could be highly assumed that the Western influence on educational approaches was a topic of concern for Nurani as his way of thinking was more advanced than that of any of his contemporary Muslim intellectuals and academicians. Being he was a proponent of integration both of Islamic and secular knowledge, he would have thought of planning an educational institution which is par with the Western ideal educational organizations in terms of its organizational performance, inputs, outcomes and achievements.\(^3\) That is why he created an ideal framework for a university in which educational paradigm was totally within an Islamic worldview. When we read his writings on Western influence on science, religion, and technology we could grasp

\[^1\] Coombs (1979)
\[^2\] For further details on Madrasah al-Zahra’, see ‘The Words’ p. 779.
that Nursi was aware of Western material worldview in which religion and reason were seen as incompatible.

Another cardinal point to be noticed here is that it was the time Said Nursi comprehended about the system of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, in which only religious education was taught at a time. Even though he recognized its educational approach, he was concerned of an educational system integrating the two types of knowledge. He tried to convinced the audience that there is a high need for Muslim world to be educated both religious and secular sciences; otherwise we would be unable to regain our lost educational tradition. The fact that he emphasized most on was that the education for a Muslim should be embedded with the most authentic resource of knowledge, which is the Holy Qur’an.4

Therefore, his idealization of an Islamic University with an excellent integration of revelation and reason was, as I believe, the first of his intellectual contributions towards a worldview-bound education. He developed a view that this institution should be in congruence with Qur’anic framework and all kinds of sciences and disciplines should be produced referring to the divine words. In other words, he recognized the importance of both body (nafs) and spirit (ruh) with a worldview promoted by the Holy Qur’an. Nursi was very much concerned about the development of science and its significance in human life as he once mentioned that, “at the end of time, mankind will pour into science and technology; it will obtain all its power from science; power and dominion will pass to the hand of science” (Nursi, 1977, p. 275). But at the same time he was fully matured to conceptualize the importance of science education which not only focused on bodily dimension of human but also on his spiritual aspect.

Case 2: Nursi as an Advocate of True Happiness by knowledge of Divine Unity, the Bedrock of Islamic Worldview

It may be accused that there have been many studies related to the theological thoughts of Said Nursi, and any more study concerning his perceptions on divine unity is irrelevant. To certain extent it is true. However literature relating his views on the oneness of God with an educational conception is, to my understanding, rare. As a Muslim scholar, Sa’id Nursi may be was a person situated in the minds of every reader by many of his contributions. Yet, as an educator of Modern Muslim mind, the thing is different as it is difficult to interpret his understanding of the divine oneness looking specifically into this aspect. Let me quote one of his prolific comments on the divine unity and love of God:

Be certain on this, that the highest aim of creation and its most sublime result is belief in God. The most rank of humanity is the knowledge of God. The most radiant happiness and sweetest bounty for jinn and mankind is the love of God contained with the knowledge of God; the purest joy for the human spirit and the sheerest delight for man’s heart is the spiritual ecstasy contained within the love of God. Indeed all true happiness, pure joy, sweet bounties and unclouded pleasure are undoubtedly contained within the knowledge and love of God. The one who knows and loves God is either potentially or actually able to receive endless happiness, bounties, enlightenment and mysteries. While the one who does not truly know and love Him is afflicted spiritually and materially by endless misery, pain and fear (Nursi, 95, p.2).

From the forth mentioned comment on the oneness of God, I would like to highlight certain terms such as true happiness, spiritual ecstasy, and knowledge and love of God. In Islamic worldview, the ultimate happiness comes for a human being when he is spiritually satisfied (the result is nafs mutma’inn.) being educated with the knowledge of God. As an educator Nursi has advocated the same theory through his comments on the belief, knowledge and love of God. In other words he proclaimed that the manifestation of happiness in human being is his spiritual ecstasy which is resulted by an education, being he is educated with proper knowledge of his God. The concept of happiness is not something material according to Islamic worldview unlike other secular views. The meaning of happiness is relevant only when the man realizes, recognizes, and acknowledges his only one God. This is possible when he is properly educated within the boundary of Islamic worldview. That is why when we contemplate on the secular view of happiness it differs according to the contexts. Western theories approach happiness as something not given by God, which opposes Islamic conception of true happiness. According to them happiness is pure material as quoted by Michalos (2007):

A good or happy life is not simply given by nature, God or gods. It requires internal and external gifts and good luck beyond our control, but it also requires individual and communal initiative. For example, individuals naturally have the capacity to reason and to

4 Bashir (2011)
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act bravely and justly more or less. With the right education, training and hard work, one may come to exercise these capacities excellently (p.6).

In his view the notion of happiness is something which is partly gained by individual with ‘right education’. However, the education after all, for the Western secular ideologies is a material entity by which they aim to produce a good citizen of his state. But the proper education for a man is to be educated morally and spiritually and this process can be practiced by implementing the tarbiyah and ta’dib concepts of Islam which we named as a worldview-bounded education in the introductory part of this paper. By his aforementioned comment, Said Nursi proclaimed this type of education, being educated with knowledge of God, which leads man to ultimate happiness and spiritual ecstasy which are also the outcome of the ‘most rank of humanity’. This idea is seen in the following figure:

5 The idea which is an interpreted version of Nursi’s conception on the aspects of divine unity is taken from ‘Risale-i Nur Collection’, 2nd part of ‘The letters’. The same idea can be seen in his ‘Seventh Word’ entitled ‘The Door to Human Happiness’.

![Figure 1.1: Interpretation of Nursi’s idea of worldview-bounded education](image)

Case 3: Affirming the Practicability of Tarbiyah and Ta’deeb through Risale-i Nur Education

No need to mention that the wonderful Risale-i Nur has influenced the intellect of many youth during after the time of Said Nursi, throughout the nation. It was a terrible challenge for the Turkish government to get rid of the ‘disturbance’ from Risale-i Nur students as they were totally against the national secular ideologies and interests. The question arises here is that through which educational method was the influence of Risale-i Nur and how was its outcome seen by the nation. I would like to quote one of the Risale-i Nur students as he was defending the invaluable commentary of Qur’an in front of the court:

Those who read the Risale-i Nur, especially the perceptive young, acquire a powerful belief. They become unshakably self-sacrificing and religious, and devoted to their country. The Risale-i Nur proves rationally, logically, and in scholarly fashion with verses from the Qur’an and extremely powerful proofs and arguments, that materialist philosophy, on which communism is based, has absolutely no connection with truth and reality, and that its theories are completely unfounded. It illumines those who fall into the darkness of those rotten ideas, and saves them. It proves God’s existence with powerful evidences that cannot be denied or objected to, to even materialists, who believe only what their eyes can see (Nursi, 2007, p. 537).

By affirming a reality that the education Risale-i Nur gave to youth was marvelous in terms of its comprehensive approach to the modern world, the student emphasizes on the significant interference of the book in their religious education. The purpose of Said Nursi in educating the youth was to know by themselves first and then understanding their two worlds, the momentary and the real worlds. Nursi’s education through Risale-i Nur was a key step to disconnect with the material benefit of knowledge and education, which is being promoted by the secular educational system. That is why it was faith-oriented other than being a job-oriented.
entity. Having this in mind, we have to analyze the practicability of tarbiyah and ta’deeb in a general context in order to get an idea on how Nursi was successful in applying his knowledge transformation, the tarbiyah process directly contributing to a worldview-bound education system in its full swing.

The issue of practicability of tarbiyah and ta’deeb in at least an Islamic environment would force us to conclude making three main observations:

1- The secular-dominant education system of the present world does not permit a floor for proper open-ended researches on the application of particular worldview-bound education; and to make things worse, the academic fields of both secular and so-called Islamic educational centers are fully institutionalized, surrounded with impersonal bureaucracy. To get this fact clear, reading the historical background of post-Second World War educational planning is highly recommended.

2- The Muslim-governed states are in a terrible loss of the true knowledge-oriented spirit and thus, the culture of learning (Kazmi, 1996) is being disappeared while it used to be an identity of a true Muslim in the past.

3- Representation of the education institutions in Islamic worldview is being misunderstood by academic and non-academic administrators; there are myriad knowledge factories in our Islamic educational sector without having a place for making knowledge dynamic by its useful application.

The reason for me to make a present observation like this is to show, comparing with what Nursi did, how Nurs’s type of educating the people became successful in applying his knowledge in order to get an idea on how Nursi’s education process was not only to serve the Qur’an and the religion. Nursi was trying to integrate physical world of Islam with metaphysical world of Islam emphasizing the life after a material world. In this way he was immersed with an education process strongly criticizing the materialist West and logically ascertaining the resurrection of living being in the other world. Based on this fourth case, which seems to be more significant among all others, we can make the following analysis:

1- The problem pertaining to the education of the Muslim community was clearly identified by Said Nursi and by seriously concentrating on Qur’anic worldview he was able to apply the true spirit of

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7 Nusri (2007)
8 ibid.p.779.
9 ibid. p.781
education, defending the attacks against Islam.

2- While the Western philosophies tried to dominate the mindset of ummah during the time of Nursi, he could successfully overcome all of them by integrating the knowledge structure of Qur’an in an environment conducive to modern sciences.

3- The main reason for Said Nursi to study modern sciences along with religious sciences including Islamic theology was that he was enough aware of a situation where only one type of knowledge always failed. Put it simply, he realized that the integration of both types knowledge could help the student be prepared for regaining the culture of tarbiyah and ta’deeb.

Conclusion

This paper tried to understand the intellectual contribution of Badi’uzaman Said Nursi to a worldview-bound education for Muslim world. In order to clarify the notion of a worldview-bound education system the author firstly referred to some of the literature to find the definition of worldview both in secular and Islamic environment. Then after the education bounded with an Islamic worldview was defined by conceptualizing and analyzing the two Islamic terms of education, tarbiyah and ta’deeb.

Reference


