

DISCUSSIONS

TA'DIB AS A COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION IN ISLAM

Its Historical Significance and Contemporary Relevance

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Traditionally, Muslims have used three terms, interchangeably, to refer to education namely *ta'lim*, *tarbiyyah* and *ta'dib*. Sometimes, they would even used them in combination, such as *ta'lim wa tarbiyyah*. However, since the mid 1970's, the Malaysian philosopher, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (b.1931)¹ has been consistently and systematically suggesting that the true and comprehensive term for education in Islam is reflected in the term *ta'dib*, in which meanings conveyed by the other two terms are included. who has systematically defined the meaning of education and has coherently articulated a system to actualize it, starting, strategically, at the university level. Deeply imbedded in the *sufi* metaphysical and ethical tradition, he has also consistently argued and clarified that the purpose of education in Islam is not merely to produce a good citizen, nor a good worker, but a good man. In one of his most important and influential works he underlines that:

it is man's value as a real man, as the dweller in his self's city, as citizen in his own microcosmic kingdom, as a spirit, that is stressed, rather than his value as a physical entity measured in terms of a pragmatic or utilitarian sense of his usefulness to state, society and the world.²

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- 1 For a detailed biography of al-Attas and an evaluation of his thought in the context of contemporary Muslim world, please see my *The Educational Philosophy and Method of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), Introduction. The present article is a summary of chap. iii of the book which, hereafter, will be cited as *Educational Philosophy*.
- 2 *Islam and Secularism* (Petaling Jaya: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978), 141, cited hereafter as *IS*.

He argues that a good citizen or worker in a secular state may not necessarily be a good man; a good man, however, will definitely be a good worker and citizen.³ It is obvious that if the employer or state is good as defined from the holistic Islamic framework, then being a good worker and citizen may be synonymous with being a good man. But an Islamic state presupposes the existence and active involvement of a critical mass of Islamically-minded men and women. In a later work, al-Attas emphasizes that stressing the individual is not only a matter of principle, but also “a matter of correct strategy in our times and under the present circumstances.”⁴ He further argues that stressing the individual implies knowledge about intelligence, virtue, and the spirit, and about the ultimate destiny and purpose. This is so because intelligence, virtue, and the spirit are elements inherent in the individual, whereas stressing society and state opens the door to legalism and politics.⁵

However, al-Attas asserts that Islam accepts the idea of good citizenship as the object of education, “only that we mean by ‘citizen’ a Citizen of that other Kingdom, so that he acts as such even here and now as a good man.”⁶ The primary focus on the individual is so fundamental because the ultimate purpose and end of ethics in Islam is the individual.⁷ It is because of this notion of individual accountability as a moral agent that in Islam it is the individual that shall be rewarded or punished on the Day of Judgement.

I. A MAN OF ADAB

An educated man is a good man, and by ‘good’ he means a man possessing *adab* in its full inclusive sense. A man of *adab* (*insan adabi*) is defined as:

3 Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Message to Muslims). A long manuscript dictated to his secretary in March 1973, 51-52; idem, *Islam: The Meaning of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality* (Petaling Jaya: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1976), 33-34, hereafter cited as *IJOEM*; idem, editor, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education* (London: Hodder & Stoughton/King A. Aziz University, 1979), 32-33, also idem, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Petaling Jaya: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1980), 25, cited hereafter as *CEII*. I have elaborated this idea of al-Attas in my article, “Insan Baik Teras Kewarganegaraan” (The Good Man as the Core of the Good Citizen), *Pemikir*, January-March 1996, 1-24.

4 *Aims and Objectives*, 6.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Aims and Objectives*, 32-33.

7 *IS*, 70; cf. a hadith of the Prophet: “Whosoever sees an evil action (*munkar*), he should change it with his hand, if not with his tongue, if not with his heart, and the latter is the weakest in faith.”

the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God; who understands and fulfills his obligations to himself and others in his society with justice, and who constantly strives to improve every aspect of himself towards perfection as a man of *adab* [*insan adabi*].⁸

Education, is thus *ta'dib*:⁹ the instilling and inculcation of *adab* in man. The Qur'an testifies that the Holy Prophet is the Ideal who is the best example of such a man, whom some scholars have called the Perfect or Universal man (*al-insan al-kulliy*).¹⁰ Thus the organization of administration and of knowledge in an Islamic educational system should reflect the Perfect Man.¹¹

The concept of *ta'dib*, if properly understood and competently explicated, is the correct concept for education in Islam, and not *ta'lim* or *tarbiyah* which are currently in vogue among Muslims all over the world, because *ta'dib* already includes within its conceptual structure the elements of knowledge (*ilm*), instruction (*ta'lim*), and good breeding (*tarbiyah*).¹² Although the Qur'an does not use the word *adab* or any of its derivatives, the word itself and some of its derivatives are mentioned in the traditions of the Holy Prophet, of the Companions, in poetry and in the works of later scholars.¹³ *Adab* had a wider and more profound meaning before it became restricted to only a few of its many significations, namely belles-lettres and professional and social etiquette.¹⁴ In its original and basic sense, *adab* means the invitation to a banquet

8 *Risalah*, 54.

9 *Aims and Objectives*, 37.

10 Cf. “the most honourable,” *al-Hujurat* (49): 13; “the beautiful model for conduct,” *al-Ahzab* (33): 21; and *al-Qalam* (68): 4; “a (universal) messenger to all mankind,” *Saba'* (34): 28.

11 *CEII*, 39; also *Risalah*, 157.

12 *CEII*, 34.

13 There are at least 18 entries on *ta'dib*, *addaba*, and *adab*, many of which occur in more than one hadith collection. See A. J. Wensinck and J. P. Mensing, *Concordance et Indices de la Tradition Musulmane*. 7 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1943), 1: 26; Nasrat Abdel Rahman, “The Semantics of *Adab* in Arabic”, *Al-Shajarah*, 2, No. 2 (1997), 189-207. In this paper Prof. Abdel Rahman painstakingly analyzed the various shades of meanings of the term *adab* and its various derivatives, especially *ta'dib*, from about 50 major Arab authorities, and has generally confirmed the interpretation of al-Attas.

14 *CEII*, 36. F. Gabrieli, in his brief yet succinct exposition of *adab*, explains that in the first century of the hijrah, *adab* carried within it an intellectual, ethical and social meaning. Later it came to mean a sum of knowledge which makes a man courteous and ‘urbane’, and by the time of al-Hariri in the 10th century C.E., in the meaning of *adab* had become much restricted to a discipline of knowledge, namely *adabiyat* or literature. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), s.v. “*adab*”.

15 *CEII*, 24-25; also *IS*, 142-143.

16 *Op. cit.*, 24-25.

which already implies therein the idea of a good and honourable social intercourse which has been Islamized from its pre-Islamic context by introducing spiritual and intellectual elements into its semantic field. There the Qur'an is referred to as God's invitation to a banquet on earth (*ma'dabat Allah fi'l-ard*), of which we are persuaded to partake by means of acquiring knowledge of it (*fa ta'allam, min ma'dabatih*).¹⁵ Al-Attas expounds the tradition thus:

The Holy Qur'an is God's invitation to a spiritual banquet, and the acquiring of real knowledge of it is the partaking of the fine food in it. In the same sense that the enjoyment of fine food in a fine banquet is greatly enhanced by noble and gracious company, and that the food be partaken of in accordance with the rules of refined conduct, behaviour and etiquette, so is knowledge to be extolled and enjoyed, and approached by means of conduct as befits its lofty nature.¹⁶

Al-Attas further refers to another *hadith* cited in the same work, which records the statement of the Holy Prophet: "My Lord has instilled *adab* in me (*addabani*) and so made my education (*ta'dibi*) most excellent." Al-Attas has carefully translated the verb *addabani* in that hadith as has educated me, and has rendered *ta'dib* as education, hence: "My Lord has educated me and so made my education most excellent."¹⁷ Al-Attas cites Ibn Manzur who equates *addaba* with *'allama*, which fortifies his position that the right and proper Islamic concept for education is *ta'dib*.¹⁸ To my knowledge, al-Attas is the first to interpret and hence translate *'addabani* as 'educated me'. The content (*maudu'*) of *ta'dib* according to early scholars is *akhlaq* (ethics and morality).¹⁹ The fact that the Prophet's education (*ta'dib*) is made most excellent by God Himself is corroborated positively by the Qur'an which affirms the Prophet's most honoured status (*akram*), as well as his excellent and exemplary ethical-moral standing (*akhlaq*).²⁰ This is further confirmed by the Holy Prophet's statement of mission that he was sent to perfect good ethics and morality: *Innama bu'ithtu li-utammima husna'l-akhlaq*.²¹ The most perfect of believers in terms of faith (*akmalu'l-mu'minin imanan*) according to the

17 *Aims and Objectives*, 1; *CEII*, 26.

18 *CEII*, 26; *IS*, 144.

19 Mahmud Qambar, *Dirasat turathiyah fi'l-tarbiyah al-islamiyyah*, 2 vols. (Doha, Qatar: Dar al-Thaqafah, 1985), 1: 406.

20 *Al-Ahzab* (33): 21; *al-Hujurat* (49): 13; and *al-Qalam* (68): 4.

21 This hadith is found in the *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik and *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Cited in A. J. Wensinck and J. P. Mensing, *Concordance*, 2: 75.

Holy Prophet are those with the best ethics and morality (*ahsanuhum khulqan*).²² It is obvious now that the Prophet's activities of teaching the Holy Qur'an (*yu'allimu'l-Kitab*) and wisdom (*hikmah*) and purifying the Muslims are direct manifestations of this role of *ta'dib*.²³ Thus, from the earliest Islamic times, al-Attas has thought, *adab* was conceptually fused with right knowledge (*'ilm*) and proper and sincere action (*'amal*), and became significantly involved in the intelligent emulation of the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet.²⁴

Based on what he regards as the original Islamized meaning of *adab* and on an analysis of its semantic field, al-Attas proposes his own definition:

Adab is recognition and acknowledgement of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically according to their various grades and degrees of rank, and of one's proper place in relation to that reality and to one's physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials.²⁵

Recognition, is knowing again (re-cognize) one's Primordial Covenant with the Lord and everything that follows from it.²⁶ It also means that matters and things are already in their respective proper places in the various orders of being and existence, but that man, out of ignorance or arrogance, "makes alterations and confuses the places of things such that injustice occurs."²⁷ Acknowledgement is requisite action in conformity with what is recognized. It is 'affirmation' and 'confirmation' or 'realization' and 'actualization' in one's self of what is recognized. Without acknowledgement, education is nothing but mere learning (*ta'allum*).²⁸ The significance of the above meanings of *adab* as they relate to the education of a good man

22 This hadith is found in the *Sunan* of Abu Dawud and the *Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal; cited in Wensinck and Mensing, *Concordance*, 2: 75.

23 *The Holy Qur'an*, *Ali 'Imran* (3): 164 and *al-Jumu'ah* (62): 2; also *al-Baqarah* (2): 129 ("He (the Holy Prophet) teaches them the Book and wisdom and purifies them").

24 *CEII*, 35; cf. Nasrat Abdel Rahman, "The Semantics of *Adab*", 2-18.

25 *CEII*, 27. Based on this definition of *adab*, al-Attas ingeniously elaborates on the statement of the Holy Prophet quoted above (God has educated me) in this manner: "My Lord made me recognize and acknowledge, by what [i.e., *adab*] He progressively instilled into me, the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it led to my recognition and acknowledgement of His proper place in the order of being and existence; and by virtue of this He made my education most excellent." *Ibid*, 27-28.

26 The Primordial Covenant which is cited by all *Sufis* is derived from the Qur'an 7:172: "When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam--from their loins---their decedents, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): "Am I not your lord?"---they all said:"Yea! We do testify!"

27 *CEII*, 21.

28 *Ibid*.

is further underlined when it is realized that the recognition, which involves knowledge, and acknowledgement, which involves action, of proper places explained in the section above, are related to other key terms in the Islamic worldview, such as wisdom (*hikmah*) and justice (*'adl*), and reality and truth (*haqq*). Reality and truth (*haqq*) is defined as both the correspondence and coherence with the right and proper place.²⁹

Several examples of how the notion of *adab* is manifested in the various levels of human existence can be cited. *Adab* towards one's self starts when one acknowledges one's dual nature, namely the rational and the animal. When the former subdues the latter and renders it under control, then one has put both of them in their proper places, thereby placing one's self in the right place.³⁰ Such a state is justice to one's self; otherwise it is injustice (*'ulm al-nafs*). When *adab* is referred to human relationship, it means that ethical norms which are applied to social behaviour would follow certain requirements based on one's standing in say, the family and society. One's standing "is not formulated by the human criteria of power, wealth, and lineage, but by the Qur'anic criteria of knowledge, intelligence and virtue."³¹ If one displays sincere humility, love, respect, care, charity, etc., to one's parents, elders and children, neighbours and community leaders, it shows that one knows one's proper place in relation to them.

Referring to the domain of knowledge, *adab* means an intellectual discipline (*ketertiban budi*) which recognizes and acknowledges the hierarchy of knowledge based on the criteria of degrees of perfection (*keluhuran*) and priority (*keutamaan*), such that the ones that are based on revelation are recognized and acknowledged as more perfect and of a higher priority than those based on the intellect; those that are *fard 'ayn* are above *fard kifayah*; those that provide guidance (*hidayah*) to life are more superior to those that are practically useful (*kegunaan amali*). *Adab* towards knowledge would result in the proper and correct ways of learning and applying different sciences. In conjunction with this, respect towards scholars and teachers is one manifestation of the *adab* towards knowledge. The purpose of seeking knowledge and of education ultimately is such that the self will attain happiness in this world and in the hereafter.

For the natural world, *adab* means the discipline of the practical intellect (*akal amali*) in dealing with the hierarchical program that characterizes the world of nature such that a person

can make a proper judgement concerning the true values of things, as God's signs, as sources of knowledge, and things useful for the spiritual and physical development of man. In addition *adab* towards nature and the natural environment means that one should put trees and stones, mountains, rivers, valleys and lakes, animals and their habitat in their proper places. And *adab* towards language means the recognition and acknowledgement of the rightful and proper place of every word in a written or uttered sentence so as not to produce a dissonance in meaning, sound and concept. Literature is called *adabiyat* in Islam precisely because it is seen as the keeper of civilization, the collector of teachings and statements that educate the self and society with *adab* such that both are elevated to the rank of the cultured man (*insan adabi*) and society. For the spiritual world, *adab* means the recognition and acknowledgement of the degrees of perfection (*darajat keluhuran*) that characterize the world of spirits; the recognition and acknowledgement of the various spiritual stations (*makam keruhanian*) based on acts of devotion and worship; the spiritual discipline which rightly submits the physical or animal self to the spiritual or rational self.³² Jurjani's definition of *adab* is equivalent to *ma'rifah* (which is a special kind of knowledge) which prevents its perceptor from all kinds of error.³³ No wonder then, *adab* is also the spectacle of justice (*'adl*) as it is reflected by wisdom (*hikmah*).³⁴ Therefore, by synthesising the meaning of knowledge, of meaning and of *adab*, the complete definition of Islamic education is given as *ta'dib*, which includes the ultimate purpose, content and method of education:

the recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of God in the order of being and existence.³⁵

As stated earlier, al-Attas rejects the terms *tarbiyah* and *ta'lim* -- independently used or in combination (*ta'lim wa tarbiyah*) to refer to the comprehensive meaning of education in Islam, thereby indicating their individual inadequacies. He rejects *tarbiyah* because it pertains only to the physical aspect in the case of plants, and only to the physical and the emotional

29 *Risalah*, 186-188; idem, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1989), 22.

30 Al-Attas, "Address of Acceptance of Appointment to the al-Ghazzali Chair of Islamic Thought", in *Commemorative Volume on the Conferment of the al-Ghazzali Chair* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1994), 31. Hereafter cited as *Acceptance Speech*.

31 Ibid, 30.

32 *Risalah*, 155-157. Cf., *Acceptance Speech*, 31.

33 Sharif al-Jurjani, *Kitab al-Ta'rifat* (Beirut: Maktabah Lubnaniyyah, 1990), 10; cf. Nasrat Abdel Rahman, "The Semantics of *Adab* in Arabic", 202.

34 *CEII*, 23.

35 Ibid, 27.

aspects of growth and development in the case of animals and man.³⁶ Since *tarbiyah* involves only the physical and emotional aspects of human growth. Hence the Pharaoh in the Qur'an, *al-Qasas* (28):18, can claim to have given *tarbiyah* to Prophet Musa. As for the term *ta'lim*, it is generally limited to the instructional and cognitive aspects of education. The significations of both *ta'lim* and *tarbiyah*, as they pertain to man, are already included in the meaning of *ta'dib*.³⁷ It is perhaps due to these subtle shades of meaning that some authorities tend to distinguish 'ilm and *ta'lim* or their synonyms, from *adab* and *ta'dib*. Al-Attas would agree with the interpretations of earlier authorities such as Ibn 'Abbas and Ibn al-Mubarak. Ibn 'Abbas, commenting on the verse in *al-Tahrim* (66):6, "Protect yourselves and your families from a fire (whose fuel is men and stone)", said that it means "instruct them (*faqqihuhum*) and teach them *adab* (*addibuhum*)".³⁸ Ibn al-Mubarak has been quoted as saying that "We stand more in need of *adab* than a great deal of knowledge ('ilm)."³⁹ The usage of *ta'dib* and *addaba* in other contexts does not negate the educational significance of these terms, i.e., *fiqh* and 'ilm; in fact they further reinforce it. For example, the Holy Prophet has used *ta'dib*, albeit in the metaphorical sense, to refer to the taming of horses,⁴⁰ which requires disciplining their souls to respond to the instructions of their master. The verb *addaba* has also been used in early Islam to indicate punishment,⁴¹ and in modern Arabic, the phrase *majlis al-ta'dib* is equivalent to the disciplinary board. Since punishment is within the semantic field of *ta'dib*, it implies that

proper education should include certain types of punishment, that are intended to discipline the mind and spirit. Certainly the meaning of discipline cannot be reduced to refer to punitive aspects only but more importantly it should refer to the intellectual, spiritual and ethical.

It is thus clear that education as *ta'dib* is different from mere instruction or training. The distinction between education and training is being made also by many serious educationists in the West. They seem worried that modern education is more concerned and effective in the training of students for different professions but not in their education. While training can be performed on man and animals, education properly speaking, can only be carried out for human beings.⁴² Many parties have neglected the fundamental distinction between education and mere training because they have consciously or unconsciously erased the ontological boundary between man and animal, a condition which is at cross purposes with the Islamic worldview.

The term *ta'dib* as education has been rightly used primarily by *Sufi* scholars who characteristically championed the complete development of the Islamic personality through the proper development of the senses, intellect and morals. However, the *adab* of all Muslim students and professional groups, such as the jurists and judges, political and military leaders, musicians, teachers and students, has been emphasized as an integral part of education. The fact that *adab* has been linked to professional education and ethics throughout Islamic history is sufficient to reject the idea that *ta'dib* is basically limited to education at the lower levels, or to younger students and performed first by families then followed by private tutors or teachers.⁴³

36 Ibid, 29. Hence the terms *al-tarbiyah al-badaniyyah* (physical training), *tarbiyat al-hayawan* (stockbreeding), *tarbiyat al-dajaj* (chicken farming, poultry husbandry), *tarbiyah al-samak* (pisciculture), *tarbiyat al-nabatat* (plant cultivation).

37 *CEII*, 28-33; *IS*, 144-145, note 123.

38 Abu'l-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri, *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah fi 'Ilm al-Tasawwuf* (Damascus: Dar al-Khayr, 1988) p. 284. Eng. trans. by B. R. von Schlegell. Intro. by H. Algar, *Principles of Sufism* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990), 308.

39 Al-Qushayri, *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, 285; trans. 311. Earlier scholars did not use the term *tarbiyah* as a title for a treatise on education, with the exception of the treatise by Burhan al-Din al-'Uqsura'i (d. 1502) entitled *Risalah fi'l-Tarbiyah wa'l-Taslik* (A Treatise on Education). Most of them used the term *ta'lim* or *adab* in the title of the works on education. The earliest to use the term *adab* in the title of his educational treatise is Abu al-Najib 'Abd al-Qadir al-Suhrawardi (d. 1169), *Adab al-Muridin* (Education of Students). Many who used the term *ta'lim*, such as Burhanuddin al-Zarnuji (d.1203), seemed to interpret education in the manner conveyed by *adab* or *ta'dib* for they did not limit the educational experience only to the cognitive aspect but significantly included the spiritual, the ethical, and the social aspects.

40 Al-Nasa'i, *Sunan*, 4: 6. Nasrat Abdel Rahman, "The Semantics of *Adab* in Arabic", 195. Al-Attas points out that when used for animals *adab* is meant metaphorically, i.e., by analogy with its usage for mankind where its meaning is given in its real sense. Personal discussion at ISTAC.

41 It is recorded in the *Sunan* of Ab, Dawud, 4: 183, that a companion 'Amr b. al-'As asked the Caliph 'Umar: If a man *addaba* one of his citizens, do you allow the citizen to retaliate? Cited in Nasrat Abdel Rahman, "The Semantics of *Adab* in Arabic", 195-196.

42 See for examples, Robert Maynard Hutchins, *Higher Learning*, chap. II, 33-58; Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1943), 18-20, 51-55; Jose Ortega y Gasset, *Mission of the University*, edited and translated by Howard Lee Nostrand, 1944 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 38-39; Robert L. Belknap and Richard Kuhns, *Tradition and Innovation-General Education and the Reintegration of the University: A Columbia Report* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 3; Marjorie Reeves, *The Crisis in Higher Education: Competence, Delight and the Common Good* (Milton Keynes, U.K.: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 1988), 2-3.

43 This idea is forwarded by Mahmud Qambar, *Dirasat Turathiyyah*, 1: 403-405. Certainly when one of the most eminent *Sufis*, Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz in the 9th century C.E. concludes his systematic discourse on *Sufi* experience, *Kitab al-Sidq*, by claiming that he is an insightful and intelligent educator of his times (*inni bi-mu'addibin basirin jahbadhin li-zaman hadha*), he does not mean that he is an educator merely of young students! Al-Jahiz' (d. 869 C.E.), who viewed *adab* as comprehensive education, is right to uphold this broad meaning of *adab* and attempted to resuscitate this basic understanding of *adab* after its meaning had been increasingly restricted; Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz, *Kitab al-Sidq* (The Book of Truthfulness). Edited and translated by A. J. Arberry (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1937), 73; Cf., Tarif Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam: The Cultural Heritage of the Golden Age* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1985), 56-59.

44 Qambar, *Dirasat Turathiyyah*, 1: 245. In 1: 228-232, Qambar also listed the names of scholars and teachers (*mu'addib*) for the children of various influential and wealthy families in Islamic history.

The creative reintroduction of *ta'dib* as the comprehensive concept of Islamic education in the integrated and systematic manner by al-Attas is of great significance not only for the fact that it appears for the first time in the contemporary Muslim world, but more significantly, it provides an authentic, integrated and comprehensive concept and powerful framework for our educational thinking and practice. It is quite certain that *ta'dib*, as understood in a limited sense, was institutionalized in the form of personal instruction given by scholars and teachers (*mu'addib*) to children of Caliphs, Sultans, ministers, military leaders, scholars and wealthy families. This form was evident during the periods of the Umayyads all the way to the Ottomans, which has helped produce distinguished leaders of various occupations.⁴⁴ Just as illuminative knowledge (*ma'rifah*) is of a special kind, a subset of the wider knowledge (*'ilm*), in like manner *ta'dib* should be regarded as that "special" kind of education that is distinctively Islamic, compared to all the other forms of education (*ta'lim*). As we have seen, *adab* by definition, includes knowledge and wisdom. By "special" we do not mean that which has developed in later Islamic history and as interpreted by certain scholars such as Grunebaum and Makdisi to be mainly the education of the scribes or litterati.⁴⁵

Modern Western scholars who try to understand the great educational ideas of several civilizations concur that the Greek notion of *paideia* or cultural education and their understanding of an educated man remain among the most comprehensive and profound ever developed by the human race; yet the meanings contained in the concept of *paideia* clearly lacked the much needed spiritual element. It has been observed that Christian educational philosophy does have a clear spiritual root, but as evidenced in a larger part of its intellectual history, it did not show widespread and consistent inclination toward the non-religious sciences. Modern scholars have found a better integration of the religious and the so-called secular sciences in the Muslim conception and practice of *adab*. Some even suggested that the many advantages of *adab* as education par excellence can help solve some of the crises in modern education.⁴⁶

45 Gustav von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Vital Study of Islam at its Zenith*, 2nd edition of 1946 (Chicago: Phoenix Books/The University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 251; and George Makdisi, *The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 48.

46 Peter Brown, "Late Antiquity and Islam: Parallels and Contrast," in Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed., *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) pp. 23-27. For a comprehensive and profound exposition of the Greek idea, see Werner Jaeger's classic work *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. English translation by Gilbert Highet, 3 vols., 2nd edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945).

II. SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

The educational philosophy of al-Attas clearly emphasizes the development of the individual; yet it is inseparably social in the manner and context of its fulfillment. He derives the inseparability between the individual and society and of human brotherhood, not from any historically documented social contract, but rather from the Primordial Covenant (*surat al-A'raf* (7): 172) and from the meanings inherent in the concept of *din*. The first person plural employed therein (*bala shahidna! Yea! We do bear witness!*) means that each soul realizes its individuality as well as its relationship to each other and to their Lord.⁴⁷ With regard to the integrally social nature of religion (*din*), al-Attas has carefully analysed and interpreted the basic meanings of the root *dal-ya'-nun* and summarized that the primary meanings of the term *din* can be reduced to four elements, namely, human indebtedness of existence to God, human submission to Him, an exercise of judicious power, and a reflection of natural human tendency or *fitrah*, which goes back to the Day of the Primordial Covenant. By further analysing the various derivations of the word *din*, such as *dana* (being indebted), *da'in* (debtor/creditor), *dayn* (obligation), *daynunah* (judgement), and *idanah* (conviction), al-Attas connects all of these meanings with cosmopolitan and cultured organization denoted by the terms *madinah* (city or town), *maddana* (to civilize or humanize) and *tamaddun* (civilization/refinement in social culture).⁴⁸ In another place al-Attas stresses that:

When we say that the purpose of knowledge is to produce a good man, we do not mean that to produce a good society is not its purpose, for since society is composed of people, making everyone or most of them good produces a good society. Education is the fabric of society.⁴⁹

An individual is only so when he realizes simultaneously his unique individuality and the commonality between him and other persons close to him and surrounding him. An individual is meaningless in isolation, because in such a context he is no longer an individual, he is everything. As seen from our brief exposition of the meaning of *adab*, it is clear now that a man of *adab* (*insan adabi*) as understood by al-Attas is an individual who is fully conscious

47 *Risalah*, 40, and para. 29, pp. 195-106; IS, 69-70.

48 *IFOEM*, 1-4; IS, 47-50.

49 *CEII*, 25.

of his individuality and of his proper relationship with himself, his Creator, his society and other visible and invisible creatures of God. Therefore, in the Islamic sense, a good individual or a good man must naturally be a good servant to his Lord and Creator, a good father to his children, a good husband to his wife, a good son to his parents, a good neighbour to his neighbours, and a good citizen to his country. It is instructive to note that another term for *civilization* in the Malay language, beside *tamadun*, is *peradaban*, which denotes the comprehensive and multi-generational contributions of men and women of adab.

Although a society consists of individuals, the education of society cannot happen unless sufficient individuals are educated. Yet society, which is the whole, is greater than the sum of its parts.⁵⁰ Having said this, no Muslim who understands even a general worldview of the Qur'an would negate or neglect his societal duties, for he knows that even though God's judgement in the Hereafter is strictly individual in nature,⁵¹ yet His judgement in history is societal. This judgement of God in history generally does not affect the good men and women, except as trials, but sometimes even they may have to suffer if they do not perform their duty as required.⁵² Without doubt, such an integration of the spiritual and ethical qualities is the highest end of the meaning of citizenship and vocation.⁵³

Furthermore, the proper understanding and implementation of *fard 'ayn* (obligation towards the Self) and *fard kifayah* (obligation towards Society) categories of knowledge, a category which al-Attas develops from Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, would ensure the realization of personal and societal welfare. While it is obvious that the latter category of knowledge is directly socially relevant, the role of the former is generally thought to be only indirectly significant. On the contrary, mastery and practise of the *fard 'ayn* -- which is not the rigid enumeration of disciplines as commonly thought -- will ensure the proper success of *fard*

kifayah sciences, for the former provides the necessary guiding framework and motivating principles for the latter. Al-Attas reminds us that the assessment of what courses and areas to be taught and offered under the *fard kifayah* category must not be a matter of personal choice only, but rather, should involve a just consideration of the societal and national needs.⁵⁴ In fact, according to Tibawi, the succinct personal objective of traditional Islamic education, which is the attainment of happiness in this world and the next, is more concrete and more beneficial to individual citizens compared to the vague general goals of society formulated by modern national governments.⁵⁵

III. LOSS OF ADAB

As elaborated above, one of the most fundamental cornerstones of al-Attas' philosophy of Islamic education is his comprehensive concept of adab. Naturally, his analysis of the educational, intellectual, and civilizational problems points to the fact that they are rooted in the external and internal causes as explicated elsewhere. The external ones are caused by the religio-cultural and socio-political challenges from the Western culture and civilization⁵⁶ while the internal ones are manifested in three interrelated phenomena; namely, the confusion and error in the meaning and application of knowledge (*kekeliruan serta kesilapan mengenai faham ilmu*), the loss of adab (*keruntuhan adab*), and the rise of unqualified and false leaders (*tiada layak memikul tanggungjawab pimpinan yang sah*) in all fields.⁵⁷ However, it is the loss of adab that must be effectively checked and corrected if Muslims are to solve the confusion and error in knowledge and the rise of false leadership in all fields. He writes that we must first solve the problem of the loss of *adab* because knowledge cannot be taught to, or inculcated in, the learner unless he shows proper *adab* towards knowledge, its various categories and its legitimate authorities.⁵⁸

Since *adab* is an integral part of wisdom and justice, the loss of *adab* would naturally entail the prevalence of injustice, and stupidity, and even madness.⁵⁹ Injustice is of course a

50 Al-Attas, *Comments on the Reexamination of al-Raniri's hujjat al-siddiq: A Refutation* (Kuala Lumpur: Museum Department, 1975), 104-106.

51 In *al-An'am* (6): 164, God commanded the Prophet to proclaim: "Every soul draws the meed of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another."

52 *Hud* (11): 116. See also Fazlur Rahman's explanation on the Qur'an's concept of judgement in history, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 52-56.

53 J. Douglas Brown, in the concluding paragraph of his book, writes to underline the integral social nature of liberal art education at producing a whole man thus: "...an education aimed at enhancing the understanding of human response, the powers of analysis, judgement, and communication, a sense of history, and intellectual and moral integrity is indeed vocational in the highest sense." *The Liberal University: An Institutional Analysis* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), 237. Similarly Tonsor concurs that "the best kind of citizenship training I know is that education which enables its holder to perform his function in society well". S. Tonsor, *Tradition and Reform in Education* (Virginia: Open Court, 1974) 105.

54 *Aims and Objectives*, 45. For further discussion on this, see my book, *Educational Philosophy*, chap. v.

55 A. L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Tradition and Modernization into the Arab National Systems* (London: Luzac & Co., 1972), 207.

56 *Risalah*, 12-27.

57 *Ibid*, 178-180.

58 *Ibid*, 180-183; *Aims and Objectives*, 3.

59 *Op. cit.*, 186-187.

condition where things are not in their right places. Stupidity (*humq*), is the deployment of wrong methods to arrive at right goals or ends, while madness (*junun*) is the struggle to attain false or wrong aims or goals.⁶⁰ It is indeed a madness if the very purpose of seeking knowledge is other than the attainment of true happiness or the love of God (*mahabbah*) in this world according to the dictates of the true religion, and the attainment of His vision (*ru'yatullah*) in the Hereafter.⁶¹ Similarly, it is utter stupidity to attempt to attain happiness in this world and in the next without the right kind of knowledge and practice. Al-Attas elaborates on some other negative effects of the pervasive loss of *adab*:

Authentic definitions become undone, and in their stead we are left with vague slogans disguised as concepts. The inability to define, to identify and isolate problems, and hence to provide for right solutions; the creation of pseudo-problems; the reduction of problems to merely political, socio-economic and legal factors become evident. It is not surprising if such a situation provides a fertile breeding ground for the emergence of extremists of many kinds who make ignorance their capital.⁶²

It is a truism that the world is increasingly functioning like a global village where education for intrinsically good men and women, i.e., men and women of *adab*, will be definitely more useful than education merely for trained and useful citizenship. This is because most important projects, whether economic, educational or political, are increasingly international in nature and significance, while narrow nationalistic agenda of multinational participants will undermine the proper success of such projects. Fast and efficient international travel enable good citizens of unjust regimes or organizations to extend their pernicious activities with greater speed and scope, and with more efficient ability to escape. Exciting developments in information technology have rendered national boundaries meaningless, conveying virtually limitless amount of information of various degrees of utility, good and evil. The potentially useful information explosion and its almost instantaneous global reverberations have caused innumerable confusion, not to mention the ethically, culturally and socially harmful contents. These developments require, more than ever before, that individual men and women be intrinsically good in the sense of *adab*. The intricately intertwining nature of

the global economy would destroy the economies and millions of lives if citizens of powerful and influential economies sought mainly to profit their own short-term personal or national interests.⁶³ An educated person, a person of *adab*, is in this sense a universal person who understands and practices right *adab* in himself, in his family, in his environment and in the world community. A person of *adab* by definition, as al-Attas understands and practices it, can deal successfully with a plural universe without losing his identity. Dealing with various levels of realities in the right and proper manner would enable him to attain the spiritual and permanent state of happiness here as well as in the Hereafter. This implies that the planning, contents, and methods of education should reflect a strong and consistent emphasis on the right *adab* towards the various orders of realities. To realize this objective, a new system of education must be formulated and implemented in the Muslim community which must focus on the university. He has successfully experimented this comprehensive concept of *ta'dib* at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Kuala Lumpur, of which he was the founder-director from December 1987-late 2002.⁶⁴

⁶³ For further elaboration on this subject see my article, "Insan Baik Teras Kewarganegaraan", 1-24.

⁶⁴ On his conception of the university in Islam and his implementation of the idea at ISTAC, see my book, *Educational Philosophy*, chaps. iv and v, Sharifah Shifa al-Attas, writer and compiler, *ISTAC Illuminated: A Pictorial Tour of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Kuala Lumpur* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998); and on ISTAC learning culture, see Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *Budaya Ilmu: Satu Penjelasan* (Culture of Knowledge: An Elaboration), 2nd Edition (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 2003), chap. 7.

⁶⁰ Cited by Muhammad Umaruddin, *The Ethical Philosophy of Al-Ghazzali*. Reprint of 1962 edition (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1970), 166.

⁶¹ Al-Attas, *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 1.

⁶² Al-Attas, *Acceptance Speech*, 31.