

SOCIETY AND EDUCATION; AS ENVISIONED BY GULEN

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Abstract

“Do not stop doing good, even to those who have harmed you. Rather, treat them with humanity and nobility, for harming someone is brutish behavior. Returning evil with evil implies a deficiency in character, returning good for evil is nobility, says Fethullah Gulen in his book “Pearls of Wisdom.”

Gulen has presented an ideal society through the Hizmet Movement, where he advocated peace, tolerance, brotherhood, respect of other's thoughts, human rights etc. all elements of Islam but he also motivates Muslims to adapt to the modern world to cope with its challenges. He has love for humanity, ethnicity and has promoted inter-cultural dialogues between people of different religions and faiths.

Gulen has taken the most effective tool for the propagation of his thoughts that is through education. His teachings are promoting ethical and modern structure of Islam. The institutions run by Gulen do not preach about Gulen's teachings and no special courses are offered based on Gulen's teachings, the teachers inspired by Gulen are the role model and are the soul tool for transforming the pupils. These institutions offer Islam and science primarily and have brought tremendous successes for their students. This brings hope to Muslim people around the world that Islam does not stand in the way of their progress and development. The Gulen Movement can also do much in Pakistan by promoting a softer version of Islam. The Pak-Turk schools and other collaborating Institutions are inspiring the youth and masses who have been a victim of fundamentalism in the name of religion.

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Introduction

The Ottoman Empire was one of the leading and greatest lasting Muslim empires in history.¹The Ottoman rulers were of the belief that all humans irrespective of caste, creed and religion should be respected and treated equally which is also true to the teachings of Islam². Thus the tinge of secularism was present in the pre history of the country that is today, the Turkey.

The Ottoman Empire came to decline after World War I and the Allied forces wanted to colonize the Turkish territory, mostly its heartland then called Antolia. A National Struggle started from 1919 to 1922, under the leadership of Grand Turkish National Assembly in Ankara (opened in 1920 independent from Ottoman government in Istanbul). In 1923, the state opened up to the lines of western progress and civilization. As the people developed links and relationship with the West, their Islamic Ideology suffered and faith in Allah and His Prophets began to fade away from the lives of the people.³

This was the time when some prominent religious scholars take up the challenge for guiding them to the True Path. The most influential among them was Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1876-1960)⁴, born in the village of Nurs* of Eastern Turkey, thus called as Nursi. (Nur is an Arabic word which means light and Said Nursi was born in the village called Nurs, thus his movement is also known as Light Movement and his followers are called Nurcu meaning Followers of Light).

Nursi was dissatisfied with the existing educational system of the country and wanted to open Medresetuz-Zehra* (at par with Azhar University of Egypt), although the foundations were laid of the institution but the dream could not be materialized because of war and unrest in the country. It is noteworthy here that Said Nursi had also a feminist approach by giving a female name (the name of the Daughter of Mohammad PBUM) to the school and was in favour of girl's education. Nursi was not against modern knowledge but he was an advocate of teaching science and Islam both at the same time in an educational institution.⁵

Gulen Movement and Education

¹ Stephen Turnbull, *The Ottoman Empire* (UK: Osprey Publishing, 2003).

² Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³ Stanford Shaw and Ezel Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume II*. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁴ Ian Markham and SuendamPirim, *An introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought, and Writings*. (UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011).

Gulen was also born in Eastern Turkey in the village of Erzurum in 1938. Gulen's father was an *imam* (meaning preacher) and Gulen learnt from him the basics of the religion and also some Persian and Arabic. Although Gulen's first Quran teacher was his mother but Gulen's school teacher Muhammad Lutfi Efendi was influential in arousing him a yearning to spend his whole life as a devotee of Islam and under his guidance Gulen memorized the Quran. His early life's religious readings were from al-Hasan al-Basri, Harith al-Muhasibi, al-Ghazzali, and Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi. Gulen is also an appreciator of the recent works of two Indian writers, Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi (1564-1624) and Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (1703-1762) as well as Western classics like Victor Hugo, William Shakespeare, and Honore de Balzac.⁶

Nursi's books as are widely read in Turkey especially his book the *Risale-i Nur*, or the 'Treatises of Light', was most popular in the country after the Bukhari and Muslim's Hadith collections. Gulen was never a follower of Nursi's Movement. His first acquaintance with Nursi was in the 1960s when he got his first job as an *imam* preacher at the mosque of Kestanepazari in Izmir in 1966, and there he integrated some of Nursi's opinions in the classes.⁷ Along with the duty of preacher Gulen was also responsible for a student hostel attached to the mosque.

It was there in Izmir that Gulen started giving lectures to general masses by establishing "houses" a replication of Muhammad's (PBUH), *Dar e Arqam* style of teaching. [Dar e Arqam is the very first educational center of Islam established by Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) at the small house of Hazrat Arqam in the plains of Koh e Safa which produced many notable Muslims later].

The people came to listen to him in the evening in these houses, after their daily routine work or studies in the Westernized schools and society. He organized summer camps for the people where Islamic beliefs were taught for the people who were mostly pro-Western and with the passage of time these converted into a network of student

⁵ Sukran Vahide, *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The author of the Risale-i Nur*. (Malaysia, Islamic Book Trust, 2011).

⁶ Saritoprak and Griffith, "Fethullah Gulen and the 'People of the Book', A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue". *The Muslim World* Volume 95, Issue 3 (2005): pp. 325-471.

⁷ Ian Williams, "An Absent Influence? The Gulen Movement in Turkish-Islam and Its influence on Global Education and Inter-Religious Dialogue" in proceedings of the conference The Fethullah Gulen Movement I, 12 November, 2005.

boarding houses known as “lighthouses”.⁸ In these lighthouses, Gulen tried to convey and advocate for modernized Islam.

Gulen was not against modernization but his message is to remember the golden values of our religion Islam in adhering to modernization. The medium used by Gulen was emphasis on education that has science and religion both taught at the same time so we don't forget our moral values taught by our religion in becoming more modern. Gulen advocates for no essential contradiction between Islam and modernity.⁹ Gulen's thoughts were stimulated from the kind of state-society relationship of Ottoman Empire whose rulers although directed by their faith recognized the responsibility that they should also provide for all citizens of their empire and formulated Public Laws on the basis of state's needs and not according to the Islamic Law (Shari'a). Gulen believes that the state should be secular to provide stability and security to all its citizens. Gulen is against “politicizing Islam” and at the same time he respects the freedom of expression of one's faith in the society, and thus he propagates for “Educational Islamism”.¹⁰

In the schools inspired by Gulen, the curriculum is based on science, technology and medium of instruction is English. Instead of teaching only faith, he emphasized cultivation of spiritual, moral and behavioural values, of tolerance, respect, openness and peace, tolerance, brotherhood, respect of other's thoughts, freedom of speech, freedom of individual practice of faith, human rights etc. (all elements of Islam) but he also motivates Muslims to adapt to the modern world to cope with its challenges. He has love for humanity, ethnicity and has promoted inter-cultural dialogues between people of different religions and faiths. Gulen teaches for “Dialogue with all and accepting all as they are, to have better understanding, peace, harmony and tolerance in the society.”

Gulen teachings are promoting ethical and modern structure of Islam. The educational institutions established by the businessman, philanthropists and others are an independent corporate body, managed by movement volunteers.¹¹ It is important to note here that Gulen does

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Bill, Park. “*The Fethullah Gulen Movement*”. International Herald Tribune, Global Politician, December 31, 2008, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/25355-fethullah-gulen-turkey>

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Serif Tekalan, “*A Movement of Volunteers*” in proceedings of conference The Fethullah Gulen Movement I, 12 November, 2005.

not own and run these schools only the stimulus and motivation is Gulen for those running, owning and working in these schools. Moreover, the schools do not preach about Gulen's teachings and no special courses are offered based on Gulen's teachings, the teachers inspired by Gulen are the role model and are the soul tool for transforming the pupils. As in Gulen words, "*education is different from teaching. Most people can teach, but only a very few can educate.*" These institutions offer Islam and science primarily and have brought tremendous successes for their students. This brings hope to Muslim people around the world that Islam does not stand in the way of their progress and development. Mr. Fethullah Gulen says in his book "Pearls of Wisdom" (2006), that

"A nation's development and progress depends upon the intellectual and spiritual training given to the people who live within its border. A nation whose members are lacking in intellectual and spiritual development should not be expected to develop and progress."

Gulen was successful in encouraging the establishment of a network of private schools and residences, even a 'Fatih University' in Turkey and later other universities in various countries, media outlets like a newspaper "Zaman" (meaning age, time or era), a television channel named Samanyolu TV which features family oriented programs for Turkish community local and abroad, a radio station and also civil society groups¹² which are all promoting a modern, faith based ethical framework of people who can effectively compete in this challenging globalized world. This can be said as a network of civil society which aims to develop motivated individuals whose potentials are transformed into beneficial conducts to make them responsible citizens by ensuring their assimilation in the society and making them peace loving members of the world.¹³

Pakistan – Turkey Relationship

The relations between Turkey and Pakistan are historic and deeply embedded in the hearts and the minds of Turkish and Pakistani people. Turkey regards Pakistan a brother and had always maintained

¹²Bill, Park. "*The FethullahGulenMovemnt*". International Herald Tribune, Global Politician, December 31, 2008, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://www.globalpolitician.com/25355-fethullah-gulen-turkey>

¹³Serif Tekalan, "*A Movement of Volunteers*" in proceedings of conference The FethullahGulenMovemnt I, 12 November, 2005.

undaunted support in addressing problems confronted by its brotherly country. The time immemorial relations between both the brotherly countries were intertwined in religious and historic bonds and Pakistan and Turkey were friends now and forever.¹⁴ Pakistan and Turkey has always been supporters of each other at times of hardships and struggle. Both countries have majority Muslim population and thus share religious brotherhood and congenial relations from the very beginning.

Gulen Movement and Pakistan

The Gulen Movement can also do much in Pakistan by promoting human universal values such as right of education, love, tolerance, reconciliation and equal representation that are all common to humanity and embedded in Islam as faith and a way of life. The Pak-Turk schools and other collaborating Institutions are inspiring the youth and masses who have been a victim of fundamentalism in the name of religion. As Gulen says that,

*“A community that has not educated its people in a shared tradition eventually splits into different groups based on their diverging knowledge and upbringing. These groups will be hostile to each other. It is impossibly difficult for such a fractured community to progress.”*¹⁵

This is true for Pakistan as at present, the society is plagued with so many social problems like intolerance, violence, sectarianism and even terrorism. People are divided in so many faith based groups and each is hostile towards other. There is no tolerance on the part of people to accept the differences of faiths, of opinions and of religions. The education system is no exception which is in also in worst situation. There are divergent ethnic, religious and social groups in Pakistani society and each has different type of education for their children. The public schools who charge fees for uniform, books and admission are out of the reach of the poorest Pakistanis. The teachers and the administration of these public schools are also not sincere with their duties and roles and students do not gain much from them. There are few teachers in Pakistani society who could be considered as a role

¹⁴PervaizJabri, “Pakistan Turkey Relations”. Bussiness Recorder, 18 July 2012, accessed 28 September, 2012, <http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/1-front-top-news/68607-pakistan-turkey-relations-lauded.html>

¹⁵FethullahGulen,*Pearls of Wisdom*. (USA: The Light Inc, 2006). 49,52,53.

model for their students. The other option is *madrasas* or religious schools, which however provide free boarding and lodging but promote fundamentalism. The middle class are also not fond of sending their children to public schools because they are low in standard and quality of education so they prefer the new chains of private schools which are promoting Western culture and bringing attitudinal problems in their students as they neither fit in their families nor in the society.¹⁶ So the break came in the shape of Pak-Turk International Schools and Colleges which started functioning in the country in the Year 1995. These schools are inspired from Gulen movement and run on the same model adopted by Gulen to promote education with the message of peace and harmony for all nations and faiths of the world.

In Gulen's words,

An ideal community, society or world consists of ideal individuals and Ideal individuals come to be through self-development, but especially through the example that they imbibe from a teacher, one who radiates knowledge and excellence and enables them to realize and fulfill their potential to follow the same path.

Pak Turk International Schools and Colleges– An Introduction

The Economic Affairs Division (EAD), Government of Pakistan and Pak Turk International Cag Educational Foundation (Pak Turk ICEF) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 30 October 1999 for registration purposes.¹⁷

The institution was primarily meant to provide educational, cultural, medical and humanitarian support to the people of Pakistan. The schools and other institutions are running on minimal profit basis thus are affordable at the same time promoting quality education for general masses. The nominal fee collected from the enrolled students is spent on the students themselves and the schools itself. The idea is to provide the Pakistani people with less expensive quality education so the future generation of the country became self supporting and a contributing member of the society.

¹⁶ Sabrina Tavernise, "Turkish School Offer Pakistan a Gentler Version of Islam", The New York Times, Asia Pacific, 2008, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/04/world/asia/04islam.html>.

¹⁷ "Pak-Turk International Schools and Colleges", Google, 2012. www.pakturk.org.

Vision of Pak-Turk International Schools and Colleges

Pak-Turk International Schools and Colleges regard that the education provided by the school leads the students to think on a global scale and at the same time being loyal and dedicated to the values and morals of their own country. The institution embarks its students with the skills to build better relationship in the society and in their families too and equip them to face the challenges of the modern age locally and globally.¹⁸

During my interview with Mr. Adem Akgedik, Principal of the Pak Turk School Boys Section in Lahore, he defined three major problems of Pakistani society as illiteracy, poverty and disunity, adding that these problems can be countered by the education, skills and teaching of moral values to their students, who compete in the global world at different forums and win recognition and prestige for Pakistan.¹⁹

Emphasizing the essence of teachers being role model for students, Mr Akgedik stated that both Turkish and Pakistani teaching faculty is trained in line with this sense. He added that the students who are interested in studying at Turkish universities are sent to Turkey on scholarship. On return they are offered posts at Pak Turk schools for imparting the knowledge to their fellow Pakistanis.²⁰

Yet another interesting aspect of the interview was Mr. Akgedik's opinion that one-sided education would be dangerous as one-dimensional religious education would educate opinionated generations disconnected from science and one-dimensional science education would educate and produce purely materialistic generations. Mr. Akgedic opined that generations should be taught to become successful professionals like doctors, engineers or teachers who practice a faith-driven outlook for life. In his opinion, the religious scholars should know about the "Book of Universe", present all around them along with religious knowledge to be better able to guide their fellow citizens.²¹

US journalist Sabrina Tavernise highlights that the Turkish schools have now established their branches in all four provinces of Pakistan, offering a substitute to the Pakistanis from the manipulation of Islamic extremism. The schools offer Western syllabus, with English as a

¹⁸ Pak-Turk International Schools and Colleges, *Prospectus* (Pakistan: PakTurk International Schools and Colleges, 2012), 5.

¹⁹ Adem Akgedik, interviewd by Raazia Hassan Naqvi, 27 September, 2012.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

medium of instruction, including mathematics, science, English literature and Shakespeare. They have only one Islamiyat class scheduled as desired by the Government of Pakistan. Distinct from the Westernized private schools, they persuade their students to adhere to the Islamic values, and teachers are the role model in lifestyle and prayer. “Whatever the West has of science, let our kids have it,” said by Mr. Erkam Aytav who is a Turk teacher at PakTurk school. “But let our kids have their religion as well.” That style of education is becoming popular and appreciated by most of the Pakistan parents, who want their children to be equipped with the successes and modernization of the West without losing their faiths in Islam.²²

Conclusion:

In the current culture of extremism and fundamentalism branded upon Muslims who are ill-treated having been considered as terrorists all over the world, the Hizmet Movement as inspired by Fethullah Gulen may bring positive trends by highlighting the good practices inherent in the pioneering message of Islam extended and broadened by the means of education. In Pakistan there are so many systems of education prevalent but none is inculcating the values and morals of humanity and of Islam. The key to the problem should be adopting the Gulen inspired approach by making available for the students of the country with both science or modernism and Islam so they are capable of facing the challenges of this Global World.

The students would not only bring prestige for the schools and the country but as well as for the Muslims all over the world by being a true Muslim who is not lacking behind in any sphere of life. The benefits would be for the teachers as well, as they would present themselves as role model not only for their students but also for the society where they live.

Thus in my opinion, “Educational Islamism” is the need of the hour and should be adopted with full zeal to have the glory of Muslims back in the world.

²² Sabrina Tavernise, “*Turkish School Offer Pakistan a Gentler Version of Islam*”, The New York Times, Asia Pacific, 2008, accessed August 12, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/04/world/asia/04islam.html>

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