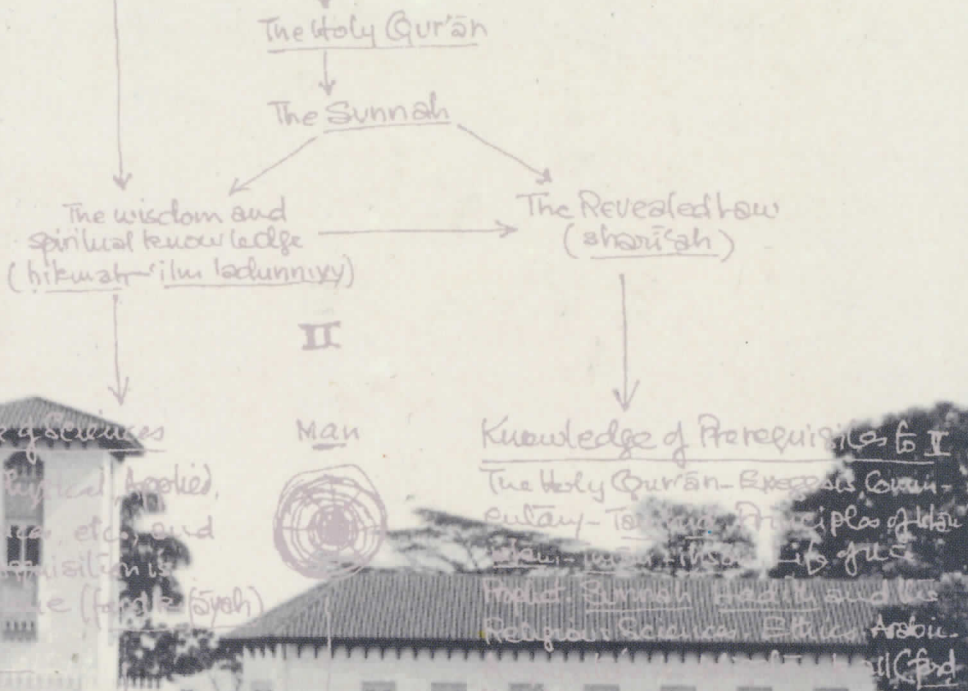


Fig. IV: General Schema of Knowledge and its Clarification and system

The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas

AN EXPOSITION OF THE ORIGINAL CONCEPT OF ISLAMIZATION



WAN MOHD NOR WAN DAUD



The topic of Islamization of contemporary knowledge and education of the Muslims has been debated since the First World Conference on Muslim Education in Mecca in 1977, but no serious attempt has been made to trace the history of the ideas and to study and evaluate some of these matters in practice.


This book is an exposition of the educational ideas and practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, who is one of the most prominent, multifaceted and creative Muslim thinkers in contemporary times, and one of the key speakers at the first and second World Conferences on Muslim Education. The author puts forward that al-Attas is the original conceptualizer of the notion of Islamization of present day knowledge and education, and that he has consistently applied it in his lifelong endeavours at Muslim higher learning institutions, particularly at ISTAC. Possibly the first work of this nature in contemporary Islamic discourse on the subject, the author uses both written and many unpublished documents, recording personal discussions and the daily practices of al-Attas as an educator, and tracing and comparing some of al-Attas' ideas and practices to those of earlier scholars and contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers. Among the important topics discussed are the metaphysical worldview of Islam; knowledge and knowing; the meaning, content and method of education; the concept and reality of the Islamic university, and the history of and the issues concerning the Islamization of present-day knowledge. Modern Muslim scholars discussed are 'Abduh, Iqbal, al-Fārūqī, Fazlur Rahman, S. H. Nasr, and others.

This work is useful for specialists, policy-makers as well as the general reader interested in the Islamization and substantive reform of Muslim education, especially at the higher levels.









*The Educational Philosophy and
Practice of Syed Muhammad
Naquib Al-Attas*

AN EXPOSITION OF THE ORIGINAL
CONCEPT OF ISLAMIZATION

Jacket Illustration: The faint words in the background of the front cover are reproduced from Professor al-Attas' own handwriting, written in early 1976, explaining his conceptualization of the general scheme of knowledge and its implications for the system and meaning of education in Islam. It was this conceptualization that explained the role of knowledge in Islam and the crucial role of the Islamic University in teaching and disseminating truly Islamic knowledge. The words on the spine and back cover are taken from Professor al-Attas' writings on the concept of happiness in Islam, later published by ISTAC in 1993 under the title *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam*. The photograph shows the conference hall and mosque of ISTAC's first campus.

Concept and Design: Aida Melly Tan Mutalib, Sharifah Shifa al-Attas, ISTAC.

The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas

AN EXPOSITION OF THE ORIGINAL
CONCEPT OF ISLAMIZATION

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Contents

PREFACE	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE Metaphysical Worldview	33
CHAPTER TWO On Knowledge and Knowing	69
CHAPTER THREE The Meaning and Purpose of Education	121
CHAPTER FOUR The Idea and Reality of the Islamic University	169
CHAPTER FIVE Curriculum Content and Educational Methods	225
CHAPTER SIX Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge: Theoretical Dimensions and Practical Contributions	291
CHAPTER SEVEN Responses to Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge	371
CITED BIBLIOGRAPHY	423
INDEX OF PERSONAL NAMES	461
GENERAL INDEX	467
LIST OF ISTAC PUBLICATIONS	505



Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, Most Compassionate. Every praise be to Him, to Whom all praise is due! And blessings and peace be upon the compassionate Prophet, and upon his Family and his Companions and upon all his true Followers after them!

I began writing this book in the month of May 1993 and finished it on Sunday afternoon, 28 June 1998, in the midst of carrying out numerous duties at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC). Among these was assisting its Founder-Director Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in the organization of courses, recruiting academic staff, recruiting and advising students, planning and organizing the Saturday Night Lecture series, acquiring materials for the library, as well as participating in various seminars and discourses in the country and abroad. The initial phase of this work was published as a long article entitled, *An Outline of the Educational Philosophy and Methodology of al-Attas* in *İslâmî Araştırmalar*, the Journal of Islamic Research (Ankara) vol. 7 number 1 Winter 1993–1994. This article contained a concurrent Turkish translation by Yasin Ceylan, then an Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara.

My knowledge of Professor al-Attas as a man and scholar was very limited prior to my involvement with ISTAC in early 1988. My first meeting with him was in 1982 when I was still a graduate student working with the late Professor Fazlur Rahman at the University of Chicago. Al-Attas came to Hyde Park while he was completing one of his major works, namely, *A Commentary on the Hujjat al-Şiddiq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānirī*, one of his tasks as the First Holder of the Tun Abdul Razak Distinguished Chair of Southeast Asian Studies at Ohio University (Athens). He invited me for interesting and provocative night discussions at his temporary residence in Hyde Park and requested me to contact him in Malaysia after I completed my Ph.D. At that time he was contemplating forming an intellectual circle that would discuss and write on Islamic intellectual and cultural matters and their relationship to the problems of contemporary Muslims. I returned to

Malaysia in 1986, taught briefly at the Faculty of Islamic Studies at the National University of Malaysia, and shortly thereafter, on the invitation of Mr. Anwar Ibrahim, who was then Minister of Education, I was seconded to the Policy Unit, Education Planning and Research Division (EPRD) of the Ministry of Education Malaysia.

When Mr. Anwar Ibrahim, in his capacity then as Minister of Education appointed al-Attas to found and head the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization in December 1987, al-Attas invited me to join and help him. Realizing that this offer was one of the best that a young scholar could ever have, and remembering also what the late Fazlur Rahman had mentioned of al-Attas, and after consulting and obtaining the consent of Mr. Anwar, I agreed, and joined ISTAC in March 1988.

Working with al-Attas, whom I gratefully regard as a genuine teacher and friend, has been the most fulfilling, exciting and challenging part of my life thus far. The prominence of al-Attas and the unique nature of work at ISTAC have enabled me to meet and deal with a selection of serious students, scholars, activists and some politicians of various levels of excellence from all over the world. I began to understand more intimately, through *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, so to speak, some of the real reasons why the religious, educational, and other socio-cultural institutions of the Muslims are in their present state of predicament, as well as to find good opportunities presently available to overcome their longstanding problems. The loss of *adab*, a condition that al-Attas had observed more than two decades ago, is still prevailing, and sadly, has not shown any sign of retreat. *Adab* as articulated in a new definition by al-Attas is not restricted in its meaning and application as understood generally in Muslim intellectual and literary history, but encompasses all aspects of human endeavour. The loss of discipline of mind, of the right knowledge and requisite action that would enable us Muslims to deal with matters, persons, and things in their right and proper manner are affecting us at all levels. Our problem is not merely the lack of sufficient financial, material, spiritual and intellectual resources, but more importantly, of being unwilling to put each one of our available resources in its right and proper place.

Similarly, many of our dealings with and handling of foreign ideas and institutions are a reflection of the loss of *adab*, of not recognizing and taking the right action with respect to each of them such that each can be perfectly assimilated within our Islamic view of Reality and Truth (by carrying out the process of Islamization) and

optimally utilized to benefit individuals and society. Hence al-Attas' consistent call for the inculcation of the right *adab*—towards all matters including the self, God, society and the environment—as the basic constituent of Islamic education at all levels is especially poignant. The influential role of higher education in the progress and development of any society and nation is already too obvious to justify, yet ironically, most educational reforms in Muslim societies concentrate on the lower levels of the educational ladder. It is in this context that we realize that al-Attas' philosophy of education and its practice, especially at ISTAC, provides a relevant and worthy example of an Islamic institution of higher learning. Once the coherent philosophy and concrete practice at the higher educational level are realized, then the reforms at the lower levels can be effectively carried out. This is because the staff and products of the higher level of education will be able to provide the necessary and required resources—whether teachers, textbooks, or social leaders in the various fields—not only at the formal and lower levels of education, but also and of equal importance, at the informal and non-formal levels.

Many people deserve to be officially acknowledged for their contribution to the successful publication of this work. Firstly, I am deeply grateful to Professor al-Attas for his trust and confidence in me. Furthermore, his careful explanation of the right and proper meanings of key terms and concepts of Islam that are either forgotten, ignored, or misunderstood and his application of these terms and concepts to new contexts; his consistent practice of his cherished ideas as well as his devotion to excellence, have all inspired me to work on this project. Despite his being occupied with many important matters, he willingly gave his time to read through the manuscript and offer many important suggestions. I will always cherish his genuine counsel and friendship.

I wish also to record my appreciation to Haji Mat Ali Mat Daud, the unassuming and tireless Registrar of ISTAC and devoted assistant to Professor al-Attas for more than two decades, for his kind support of our work at ISTAC; to my dear wife Dr. Ratnawati Mohd Asraf who never failed to encourage me when the enormity of the task sometimes slowed me down and who offered useful suggestions on some points; to Dr. Muhammad Zainiy Uthman, our Senior Research Fellow who always assisted me in solving my computer problems. My thanks goes also to five of the dedicated and able research fellows of ISTAC—Wan Azhar Wan Ahmad and Mohd Sani Badron for their

support and help in typing in the corrections in the final stages of the preparation of this manuscript as well as for the preparation of the bibliography. My appreciation also goes to Megawati Moris who, together with Mohd Sani, prepared the index and to Adi Setia who prepared the list of abbreviations. Special thanks goes to Mohd Zaidi Ismail who gave numerous critical comments on all the chapters. Gratitude is due also to Sharifah Shifa al-Attas, the general editor of ISTAC and her staff for their commitment to ensure that this manuscript is properly published. My daughters Ilhaam, Asma, Murni and Sofiya too deserve my sincere gratitude for their understanding, beyond their years, of their father's struggles. May God accept this effort as *'amal jāriah*, and may He forgive any error or shortcoming in this manuscript, for which I admit sole responsibility.

Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud
Subang Jaya
29 June 1998

List of Abbreviations

ABIM	Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia)
AIC	Arab Information Center
<i>Aims and Objectives</i>	<i>Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education</i>
AMSS	Association of Muslim Social Scientists
'Aqā'id	<i>The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th Century Malay Translation of the 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafi</i>
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
ATMA	Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu
<i>Beacon</i>	<i>The Beacon on the Crest of a Hill: A Brief History and Philosophy of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization</i>
<i>CEII</i>	<i>The Concept of Education in Islām</i>
CNN	Cable News Network
<i>Commentary</i>	<i>A Commentary on the Ḥujjat al-Ṣiddīq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī</i>
<i>The Concept of Knowledge</i>	<i>The Concept of Knowledge in Islām and its Implications for Education in a Developing Country</i>
<i>Concordance</i>	<i>Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane</i>
"Corruption"	"The Corruption of Knowledge"

DBP	Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Malay Language and Literary Council)
<i>End of History</i>	<i>The End of History and the Last Man</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>On Essence and Quiddity: An Outline of the Basic Structure of Reality in Islamic Metaphysics</i>
<i>General Theory of Islamization</i>	<i>Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago</i>
<i>Happiness</i>	<i>The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islām</i>
IBKKM	Institut Bahasa, Kesusasteraan dan Kebudayaan Melayu (Institute of Malay Language, Literature and Culture)
IDKM	Same as <i>IDSKM</i> , below
<i>IDSKM</i>	<i>Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu</i>
<i>IE</i>	<i>The Intuition of Existence: A Fundamental Basis of Islamic Metaphysics</i>
<i>IFOEM</i>	<i>Islām: The Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics and Morality</i>
IIIT	International Institute of Islamic Thought
<i>IKM</i>	Same as <i>IDSKM</i> , above
<i>IM</i>	<i>Islam and Modernity</i>
INTAN	Institut Pentadbiran Awam Negara (National Institute of Public Administration)
<i>IPS</i>	<i>Islām and the Philosophy of Science</i>

<i>IS</i>	<i>Islām and Secularism</i>
ISTAC	The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization
<i>JMBRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
MBRAS	Monographs of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society
<i>Mulla Sadra</i>	<i>The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra</i>
“The Muslim Encounter”	“The Muslim Encounter with Modern Western Civilization: Secularization and the Crisis of Identity”
<i>NMPHS</i>	<i>The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul</i>
<i>The Oldest Malay Manuscript</i>	Same as in ‘ <i>Aqā’id</i> , above
<i>PAT</i>	<i>Positive Aspects of Taṣawwuf: Preliminary Thoughts on an Islamic Philosophy of Science</i>
<i>Prolegomena</i>	<i>Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islām: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islām</i>
<i>Reconstruction</i>	<i>The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam</i>
<i>Refinement</i>	<i>Refinement of Character</i>
<i>Risalah</i>	<i>Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin</i>
“Science and Traditional Values”	“Science and Traditional Values in Islamic Society”

“Structure” “The Structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam”

SUNY State University of New York

*Terengganu
Inscription*

The Correct Date of the Terengganu Inscription

Introduction

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND¹

Syed Muhammad Naquib bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Muhsin al-Attas was born on 5 September 1931 in Bogor, Java. His genealogical tree can be authentically traced over a thousand years through the Ba'Alawi *sayyids* of Hadramaut and all the way back to the Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Holy Prophet (pbuh).² His earlier illustrious ancestors include saints, scholars and savants, one of whom, from his maternal side, was Syed Muhammad al-'Aydarus, the teacher and spiritual guide of Syed Abū Ḥafs 'Umar ba Syaibān of Hadramaut, who initiated one of the most prominent scholars in the Malay world, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī into the Rifa'iyah Order.³ Syed Muhammad Naquib's mother Sharifah Raquan al-'Aydarus, from her maternal side, came from Bogor, Java and was a descendant of the Sundanese royal family of Sukapura. His paternal grandfather, Syed

¹ All sections in this chapter with the exception of the last ("About this work"), are an updated version of my article which appears as an "Introduction" in *The Commemorative Volume on the Conferment of the Al-Ghazali Chair of Islamic Thought* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1994), pp. 1–14. All of the facts hereunder, except otherwise referred to by a footnote, are taken from *Marquis Who's Who in the World*, 10th. ed. 1991/1992 (Wilmette, Ill.: MacMillan Directory Division, 1990), p. 13, from the *Directory of Historians of Arabic-Islamic Science*, compiled and edited by Sami K. Hamarneh (Aleppo: The University of Aleppo Press, 1979), p. 18, from the official *curriculum vitae* of, and discussion with Prof. S. M. N. al-Attas. Some of the data have also been recorded in the *Shams al-Zāhirah*, an Arabic biographical work on famous scholars compiled by Sayyid Muhammad Dhia Shahab. This is a revised, enlarged, up-to-date version of an earlier work begun by Sayyid 'Abdul Rahman al-Mashhur, Hyderabad, Deccan, 1329/1911; and also the *Khidmat al-'Āshirah*, by Sayyid Ahmad al-Saqqaf, Jakarta, 1384/1964.

² The official *naṣab* of al-Attas' family in his collection shows that he is separated from the Holy Prophet by thirty seven generations.

³ S. M. N. al-Attas, *Comments on the Re-Examination of Al-Rānīrī's Ḥujjat al-Şiddīq: A Refutation* (Kuala Lumpur: National Museum, 1975), p. 11.

Abdullah bin Muhsin bin Muhammad al-Attas was a saint (*walī*) from Java whose influence was not confined only to Indonesia but extended to Arabia as well. One of his disciples, Syed Ḥasan Fad‘ak was the religious advisor to Amir Faisal, the brother of King Abdullah of Jordan,⁴ and a contemporary of the famous Lawrence of Arabia. His paternal grandmother, Ruqayah Hanum, a Turkish lady of aristocratic lineage, was married to Ungku Abdul Majid, the younger brother of Sultan Abu Bakar of Johore (d. 1895), while her sister Khadijah was married to the Sultan himself, and became the Queen of Johore. When Ungku Abdul Majid passed away, leaving two sons, Ruqayah married Syed Abdullah al-Attas and later gave birth to their only child, Syed Ali al-Attas, the father of Syed Muhammad Naquib. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas is the middle child among three siblings, the eldest being Syed Hussein who is a distinguished sociologist and the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Malaya while the youngest, Syed Zaid is a chemical engineer and a former lecturer at MARA Institute of Technology.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

Family background permanently and positively shaped Syed Muhammad Naquib’s basic education. From the family in Bogor he obtained his education in the Islamic sciences, while from his family in Johore he developed the foundations for Malay language, literature, and culture.

At the age of five, his parents sent him to Johore for formal primary education, at Ngee Heng Primary School (1936–1941), during which period he stayed with his uncle Ahmad, and later with his aunt Azizah, children of Ruqayah Hanum and Dato’ Jaafar bin Haji Muhammad (d. 1919), the first Chief Minister of modern Johore. During the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, Syed Muhammad Naquib returned to Java to continue his education, this time in Arabic at Madrasah *Al-‘Urwatu’l-Wuthqā* at Sukabumi (1941–1945). After the Second World War in 1946 he returned to Johore to resume his education, first at Bukit Zahrah School, and then at English College

⁴ Hussein bin Talal, the present King of Jordan, is the grandson of King Abdullah.

(1946–1951). During this period he lived with one of his uncles, Ungku Abdul Aziz bin Ungku Abdul Majid, a cousin of the Sultan, who was then the sixth Chief Minister of Johore. Ungku Abdul Aziz kept a good library of Malay manuscripts primarily on Malay literary and historical subjects. Syed Muhammad Naquib spent much of his youth reading and pondering over these manuscripts on history, literature, and religion as well as the Western classics in English that were available in the collections of other family members. It is partly due to this cultured social atmosphere, and mostly these reading materials, that al-Attas developed an exquisite style and precise vocabulary that uniquely characterized his Malay writings and language. His involvement with manuscripts during those formative years made a lasting and important impression on his life. He has in his personal collection to this day, “several very important Arabic and Malay manuscripts which are not even listed in Van Ronkel’s Catalogue, or in other extant catalogues of Malay mss”.⁵ Some of these are the *Risālatu’l-Aḥadiyyah* or also known as the *Risālatu’l-Ajwibah* attributed to Ibn al-‘Arabī or sometimes to his disciple ‘Abdullāh al-Balyānī/Balbānī, the *al-Tuḥfat al-Mursalāh ila’n-Nabī* by Faḍl Allāh al-Burhānpūrī, and treatises by Walī Raslan al-Dimashqī. The manuscript of Burhānpūrī is in Malay which is thought to have been lost; the only available copy of such a work is the Javanese translation of the Malay text.

After the retirement of Ungku Abdul Aziz, Syed Muhammad Naquib stayed with another uncle, Dato’ Onn bin Dato’ Jaafar, the seventh Chief Minister, until the completion of his secondary education. Dato’ Onn was the leading nationalist figure at that time and also the founder and in May 1946, the first president of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the party which has been the backbone of the government since Independence. Al-Attas recalls clearly that Datuk Onn noticed his artistic ability, and had requested him to draw UMNO’s official flag which should contain symbols of power, Malay royalty and the Islamic religion. So al-Attas drew the flag: the green kris on a yellow background both symbolise Islam and

⁵ Op. cit.; al-Attas said in a private discussion that he obtained some of these rare Islamic manuscripts from Colonel Musa known as Pak Lomak of Johore, the inventor of the Malay *ghazal* music.

In order to understand what shagawah means, it is necessary first to present a concise explanation of the opposite shagawah. The Arabic lexicons do not go back to Qur'anic usage describing it as the equivalent in English of 'great misfortune of circumstance', 'distress', 'disquietude', 'grief'. Every one of these conditions obviously requires an internal and external action. Indeed shagawah is a condition that surpasses all forms of misery, so that other terms are similar conditions but more specific in its context and only constituent elements of shagawah. These include, for example, khawf (fear, of utter solitude and death and what lies beyond, a foreboding); huzn (grief, sorrow, sadness, roughness of soul, straitened, misery in the soul and in the intellect, doubt in the heart); diq (straitened, of heart and syn. dank); hamm (disquietude, anxiety, disquiet of mind due to fear (khawf) of impending calamity, same as hamm, only that the harm that is feared occurs, so that it becomes anguish); usr (hardship, unpleasant of circumstance).

It seems to me that the above gist of the meaning already clarifies that in its generic sense it is not used in the West as tragedy — tragedy not merely as a form of art, but more so in its philosophical sense of life enacted in the experience and conscious rejection of religion and turns away from God. This is the meaning of shagawah. According to Aristotle in the Poetics