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## THE STATUS OF SCHOLARS IN ISLAM

**Abstract:** In Islamic teachings, emphasis on knowledge and scholars is one of the most vital universal principles. This principle serves to ensure social progress and spiritual elevation. In the context of globalization, intellectual potential is recognized as a key factor of stability, and the role of scholars in Islam is deemed a manifestation of divine will. Verses in Surahs Al-Zumar and Al-Mujadilah emphasize the lofty status of those endowed with knowledge. Historically, the academic legacy of polymaths like Imam Al-Bukhari, Ibn Sina, and Al-Biruni exemplifies the integration of religious and secular sciences. Their preserved trust forms the bedrock of human rights and enlightenment. Thus, honoring scholars in Islam is a divine human right and a supreme cultural relationship that establishes peace, justice, and mutual harmony.

**Key words:** Islam, knowledge, scholar, social progress, Qur'an, Sunnah, enlightenment, social responsibility, integration.

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### Introduction

The progressive development of human civilization and social systems undoubtedly depends on the degree to which intellectual potential and scholarly traditions are formed. From the earliest periods of Islamic revelation, the concept of knowledge (*ilm*) and enlightenment was declared the primary criterion for reforming society and leading it out of darkness into light. In Islamic teachings, knowledge is not merely a collection of data or a tool serving personal needs; rather, it is the fundamental foundation for understanding the mysteries of the Creator, establishing justice, and achieving collective prosperity.

Historical experience demonstrates that the advancement of any society is measured by its attitude toward scholars, the conditions created for them, and the social weight of their discourse. In Islamic

jurisprudence and philosophy, scholars are considered the spiritual and intellectual pillars of society.

In the Qur'ān, the word "knowledge" (*ilm*) and its derivatives are repeated in hundreds of places. This fact shows that the epistemological foundation of the religion relies on knowledge. The Qur'ān condemns blind imitation (*taqlid*) and calls upon human beings to reflect, ponder, and study the laws of the universe.

The distinct social and spiritual status of scholars compared to other individuals is established as a firm and immutable rule in many verses of the Qur'ān. In particular, verse 9 of Sūrat al-Zumar decrees the inequality between those who possess knowledge and those who do not [6:459]:

"Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only people of understanding will take heed".

In the exegesis (*tafsīr*) of this verse, scholars mention that this inequality manifests not only in the

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rewards of the Hereafter but also in social value in this world, the capacity to correctly evaluate events, and responsibility before society. Knowledge is a divine blessing that elevates the individual and transforms them into a just guide over others.

Furthermore, in verse 11 of Sūrat al-Mujādilah, Allah Almighty specifically emphasizes the status of scholars, demonstrating that alongside possessing faith (*īmān*), the attainment of knowledge is a factor for elevation to the highest stations [6:543]:

*“...Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do”.*

When commenting on verse 11 of Sūrat al-Mujādilah, the prominent representative of the Ḥanafī school, Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī, explains the position of scholars in society and the Shari’ah through profound logical foundations. According to the polymath, the distinct and separate mention of that given knowledge from ordinary believers in the verse is an indication of their exclusive status. Regarding the occurrence of the word “degrees” (*darajāt*) in the plural form, the scholar presents a two-fold perspective: the first refers to the high social standing, reverence, and honor of scholars in this world, while the second pertains to their magnificent rewards in the Hereafter. Furthermore, al-Nasafī cites evidence from the Sunnah in his exegesis, emphasizing that on the Day of Resurrection, scholars will be granted the right of intercession (*shafā’ah*) immediately following the prophets [1:449-450]. Scholars are the eyes and the heart of society. It is through them that people recognize their rights, social relations are regulated, and the disruption of systemic order is prevented.

There is another sublime duty balance placed upon the shoulders of the community of scholars in the Holy Qur’ān, which is to fearlessly proclaim the truth and to maintain a sense of awe exclusively toward the Creator. This dynamic is expressed in verse 28 of Sūrat Fāṭir as follows [6:437]:

*“...Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving”.*

The term “fear” (*khashyah*) used here is not a mere physical dread; rather, it is a profound sense of reverence and awe that emerges within the heart as a result of scientifically comprehending the power of Allah Almighty and the flawless order and laws governing the universe. The more deeply one investigates the secrets of existence, the more one realizes human limitation and the absolute grandeur of the Creator. Thus, authentic knowledge does not lead an individual to arrogance, but to humility and to the service of society.

The life of the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ.a.w.) and the prophetic traditions (*ḥadīths*) inherited from him comprehensively reveal the enlightenment-oriented nature of the Islamic faith. In his numerous addresses, the Messenger of Allah (ṣ.a.w.) declared the pursuit of

knowledge an obligatory duty, meaning a religious obligation (*farḍ*) for every individual, without gender or class distinctions.

In a famous tradition recorded by Ibn Mājah, it is stated:

*“...The seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim”.*

This *ḥadīth* constituted a monumental step toward popularizing literacy and fostering a scholarly environment within Islamic society. At a time when many contemporary civilizations regarded knowledge as the exclusive privilege of either the priestly class or the nobility, Islam transformed it into a sacred duty binding upon every member of society. This obligation ensured social mobility within the community. Consequently, individuals emerging even from the most impoverished strata obtained the opportunity to rise to the highest state and spiritual offices through the acquisition of knowledge.

When discussing the spiritual and functional role of scholars in society, the Prophet illustrated the distinction between a scholar and a person devoted purely to ritual worship, namely, a worshipper (*‘ābid*), through vivid rhetorical allegories. In a *ḥadīth* narrated by Imom al-Tirmidhī, it is stated [2:548-549]:

*“The superiority of the scholar over the worshipper is like the superiority of the moon over the rest of the celestial bodies on the night of a full moon.”*

This comparison rests upon a remarkably profound logical foundation. The worshipper benefits only himself, as his actions serve his personal salvation. The scholar, however, illuminates the path of an entire society, acting like a beacon guiding through the darkness of night. The conclusions drawn, discoveries made, and legal verdicts (*fatwās*) issued by the scholar serve to improve the lives of thousands or millions of people and shield them from misguidance. For this reason, engaging in scientific and scholarly research for a single hour is deemed superior in Islamic teachings to an entire night of supererogatory (*nafl*) prayers.

Notably, another narration found in the collection of Abū Dāwūd explicitly demonstrates that scholars are the inheritors of the prophets [3:39-40]:

*“...Indeed, the scholars are the heirs of the prophets. The prophets do not leave behind dinars or dirhams as inheritance, but rather, they leave behind knowledge. So, whoever takes it has taken an abundant share”.*

Following the conclusion of the prophethood, the responsibility to safeguard society from spiritual crises, defend the criteria of justice, and transmit scientific and scholarly achievements from century to century shifted to the scholars. Scholars are the trustworthy trustees and custodians of divine truths.

The Islamic religion did not confine the concept of knowledge to a narrow religious sphere. On the contrary, fields such as physics, astronomy, biology, and medicine, which pertain to studying the laws of

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nature and healing the human body, were classified alongside religious sciences as highly meritorious and essential (*farḍ al-kifāyah*) for the welfare of society. This comprehensive approach laid the groundwork for the emergence of great polymaths who propelled global civilization forward for centuries during the Islamic Golden Age.

Inspired by Qur'ānic verses concerning natural phenomena such as the falling of rain, the structure of mountains, and the movement of celestial bodies, Muslim scholars developed a scientific methodology based on experimentation and observation. Reflecting on the role of knowledge in the prosperity of society, the companion Mu'ādh ibn Jabal (r.a.) beautifully observed [5:183-184]:

“...Through knowledge, Allah Almighty elevates nations, making them leaders and guides in goodness. People follow in their footsteps and look to their deeds as an example”.

In the historical process, we can observe a vivid proof of this principle in the activities of the polymaths who emerged from our homeland. While Imām al-Bukhārī created the most flawless methodology in the world for ḥadīth science and source studies, leaving behind the masterpiece *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, Ibn Sīnā elevated the science of medicine to a completely new stage with his monumental work *al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb*. Abū al-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī accurately calculated the radius of the Earth in the fields of geodesy and astronomy. Meanwhile, al-Khwārizmī founded the science of algebra and developed the algorithmic system. Imām al-Tirmidhī brought the system of ḥadīth classification to its scientific peak.

The lifework of these scholars demonstrates that secular and religious knowledge are never opposed in Islam; rather, they complement one another like two sides of the same coin. Ibn Sīnā considered the practice of medicine to be a form of worship, and when faced with complex scientific dilemmas, he

would perform the *istikhārah* prayer, asking Allah to grant strength to his intellect. Al-Bīrūnī, through his astronomical observations, described Allah's creative mastery with absolute awe and admiration.

These contributions of scholars to society were also highly appreciated by state rulers and authorities. It is a historical reality that in the scientific center of *Bayt al-Ḥikmah* (The House of Wisdom), established during the Abbasid reign, scholars were rewarded with gold equivalent to the weight of the works they translated. This fact testifies to the high value the state placed on intellectual property and scholarly potential. Indeed, in Islamic teachings, the title of scholarship does not merely grant rights and privileges; rather, it imposes immensely heavy moral and social responsibilities upon the individual. Knowledge is a sacred trust (*amānah*) bestowed to be acted upon and to bring benefit to society.

## Conclusion

Thus, the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the centuries-old historical experience of Islamic civilization firmly confirm that the value of scholars in the Islamic faith is elevated to the status of the highest values. Scholars are not merely an intellectual class, but the spiritual leaders of society, the guarantors of justice, and the catalysts of progress. In Islamic doctrine, there is no artificial wall between religious and secular sciences, and any useful knowledge is regarded as a means to attain the pleasure of the Creator and as a high level of worship.

In today's era of globalization and technological revolution, the resurgence of the Islamic world undoubtedly depends once again on restoring the true status of knowledge and scholars, systematically funding scientific research, and enhancing the prestige of the scholarly community within society. Scholars whose activities are rooted in authentic knowledge serve as the most reliable shield protecting society from radicalism, ignorance, and spiritual decay.

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