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Thought for the Month

The unbelievers will be
Led to Hell in groups:
Until, they arrive there,
Its gates will be opened.
And its keepers will say,
“Did not messengers come
To you from among yourselves,
Rehearsing to you the Signs
Of your Lord, and warning you
Of the Meeting of this Day
Of your?” The answer
Will be: “True: but
The Decree of Chastisement
Has been proved true
Against the unbelievers!”

Al-Quran- 21:83-84

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FOCUS

Faith is the first requirement of any religion, especially Islam. So, we are a people of faith, with our faith not only in the oneness of God—*Wahdat-i-Rab*, but also in the oneness of mankind. When faith comes then everything else comes on its own. The next is the purification of morals. This means that a person should have the right attitude towards his Creator and his fellow-humans. With the evolution of societies and civilizations, the *Shariah* has also changed; but faith and righteous deeds—the foundations of religion—have not undergone any change. A person is not mere body and intellect but also a moral being. This means that the ability to distinguish good from evil is innately ordained for him. The appreciation of good as opposed to evil is a universal reality. The term Islam essentially means surrender of one's will to a higher truth and transcendental law, so that one can lead a meaningful life informed by the divine purpose of Creation, and that the dignity and freedom of all human beings can be equally protected. Along with that, it stresses the importance of mutual help and respect, and directs Muslims to extend friendship and goodwill to all, regardless of their religious, ethnic or racial background. With its universal characteristic, Islam provides detailed, multi-faceted and exhaustive guidance to its followers in a whole variety of situations. Understandably these guidelines are of different shades covering diverse scenarios and vary accordingly. Some texts lay down general rules, while others deal with particular situations. A careful study of the texts (*nasus*) of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reveals that the basis on which relations with fellow-humans stand is their dignity and equality. Every person is entitled to equal dignity and respect simply by virtue of being human. All people being descendants of Prophet Adam (PBUH), they share the honour conferred upon them by Allah the Creator. Adam is a trustee of the trust bestowed on him as a vicegerent (*Khalifa*) on earth, ordering the angels to prostrate themselves before him, and so on. The dignity and status that humanity at large, i.e., all children of Adam, share in this world has been clearly stated in the *Qur'an*: “We have honoured the sons of Adam, provided them with transport on land and sea, given them for sustenance things good and pure and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation”. (17:70).

The honour bestowed upon mankind has manifestations at different levels. The Almighty has made all Creation subservient to man including the natural forces: “It is Allah who has subjected the sea to you, that ships may sail through it by His command, that ye may seek of His bounty, and that ye may be grateful”. (45:12). The subservience has been ensured in two ways—First, Allah has endowed man with faculties that enable him to utilize the natural forces for his benefit. Second, the natural laws have been designed to fit in with human abilities; these laws (*Qanun-i-fitrat*) are unchangeable, and the *Qur'an* states: “(Such was) that practice (approved) of Allah among those who lived aforetime: No change wilt thou find in the practice (approved) of Allah”. (33:62).

From *Islamic Studies and the Future of India*
by Ishtiyaque Danish, pp.129-131

Activities of the IOS Headquarters

IOS-MANUU jointly organises seminar on “Human Rights in Islamic and Modern Perspective”

An online seminar on “Human Rights in Islamic and Modern Perspective” was jointly organised by the Institute of Objective Studies and Department of Islamic Studies, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad on December 8, 2021.

The inaugural session of the seminar commenced with the recitation of a Quranic Verse by Ashiqur Rahman. The topic was introduced by the assistant professor, deptt. of Islamic Studies, MANUU and convenor of the seminar, Dr. Shakeel Ahmad.

In his welcome address, head of the dept. Islamic Studies, MANUU, Prof. Md. Fahim Akhtar Nadvi, highlighted the activities of the department and touched upon the main aspects of the subject.

Inaugurating the seminar, the vice-chancellor of MANUU, Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan, said that the prophets were sent to the earth by Allah to know about Him and to acquaint themselves with the mystic knowledge. The Prophet (PBUH) occupied a place of exaltation among all the human beings in the world. He won over the hearts of people by His love, compassion, kindness and virtues. His teachings were guiding principles for the entire humanity even today. He remarked that only understanding rights and duties was

not enough. They must also be practiced in life in equal measure. And here lay their importance. Lauding the activities of the department of Islamic Studies, he said that it was engaged in the study and research on the subject of a higher order. On this occasion, he also released the department’s house journal “Islamic Mutaleaat” which contained the intellectual and cultural activities of its students.

The inaugural session ended with a vote of thanks by Dr. Md. Irfan Ahmad.

The inaugural session was followed by the technical session which was addressed by Prof. Mohsin Usmani from Hyderabad, Prof. Mehtab Manzar

should carve out a name for itself for being known as a place where human rights were fully safeguarded, promoted and respected, he added.

Prof. Mohsin Usmani, former dean, Indian and Foreign Languages University (IFLU), Hyderabad, focused on human rights in Islamic perspective. He observed that the right to pray was very intrinsic in Islam. In the teachings of Islam, if a great deal of stress was laid on prayer on one hand, much importance had been attached to human rights on the other. Good mannerism formed an unalienable part of it. It was the duty of every Muslim to nurture cordial relations with his neighbour. It was a part of Islamic teachings to discharge the duty of protecting human rights, he insisted.

Speaking on modern view of human rights, former professor of political science, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi, Prof. Mehtab Manzar said that Islamic concept of human rights helped a lot in the preparation of modern documents and the human rights

enshrined in them. Human rights movements also played a contributory role in the promotion of these rights. Referring to positive and negative aspects of human rights, he said that the UNICEF (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund) and specialised agencies of the United Nations (UN) played an active role in the protection of human rights.

Dr. Shakeel Ahmad said that in order to enforce and protect human rights, the current system was proactively involved. This included the codification of laws, rules, guiding principles and standards as well as a number of agencies and organisations working in the field. He presented a



A view of the speakers

from Delhi and Dr. Shakeel Ahmad. The proceedings of the session were conducted by Zeeshan Sarah, asstt. professor in Islamic Studies, MANUU.

Vice-chairman, IOS, Prof. M. Afzal Wani, who chaired the session, held that it was the duty of the state to ensure that human rights of every citizen were protected. It was also the duty of the state to see to it that no discrimination based on caste, creed and gender was made in the protection of human rights. He asked the Islamic scholars to undertake research in the field of human rights. India should be made a role-model for others to follow in giving due importance to the protection of human rights. India

detailed account of the system in place at the international and national level to ensure protection of human rights. He explained how the laws enacted to safeguard human rights had been working properly. He also discussed the legal safeguards available to prevent violation of human rights.

The seminar came to an end with a vote of thanks proposed by Dr. Shakeel Ahmad.

IOS Online Lecture on Covid-19 Pandemic and Economy in India – Challenges and Opportunities

An online lecture on ‘Covid-19 Pandemic and Economy in India – Challenges and Opportunities’ was organised by the Institute of Objective Studies on November 27, 2021.

The lecture was delivered by the head, Community Development Programme of International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), USA, Mamoon Al-Azami. Presided over by the ex-professor of Economics, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), Prof. Naushad Ali Azad, the proceedings of the lecture were conducted by the assistant secretary general, IOS, Prof. Haseena Hashia. The lecture formally began with the recitation of a Qur’anic verse by Hafiz Athar Husain Nadwi.

Introducing the topic, Prof. Haseena Hashia said that Covid-19 caused havoc to the economy of India, causing unprecedented real losses never witnessed before, even during wars. The pandemic brought to the fore the challenges to India in the form of an unprecedented increase in the level of poverty, huge losses of jobs, businesses, international trade, supply chain disruptions, near collapse of

international travel, tourism and related hospitality. While the 2.9 trillion dollar economy of the country was affected, about 7 per cent contracted in March 2021 alone, she added.

In his lecture, Mamoon al-Azami held that the Qur’an and Hadith were to guide the community. There were as many as 70 different kinds of trials that could be tackled as per the guidance of the Qur’an and Hadith. These trials differ from man to man. He said that Allah does not like a man to waste wealth, nor does He ask many unnecessary questions or spread gossip; wasting of food was also prohibited. Allah says that money



Mr. Mamoon Al-Azami delivering his lecture

should be spent on others who are pauperised, poor, and needy. Referring to the economic impact of Covid-19, he said that without equity, one could not end the pandemic, HIV, or any other epidemic. This was also supported by Peter Alexander, a British banker and the executive director of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Available figures suggested that during the pandemic, the retail giant, Amazon, earned millions of dollars as profit. This was a positive effect of Covid-19. But negatively, it also infected 219 plus million people, out of which about 4.5 million people died globally. Similarly, the stock market was drastically cut by 20 per cent.

Commenting on the Indian economic impact, he said that the country’s economy was weakening when the pandemic struck. As far as the public expenditure was concerned, it was 132 per cent, 16 per cent lower than the year 2008. Farmers lost big to local supply chain shut down. Milk demand dropped by 25 per cent, and its prices were cut by 19 per cent. He held that India was the fifth largest economy that could affect the world. According to an assessment made by the International Monetary Fund, indifferent output in India made sluggish global growth. This was also significant to note that India provided 70 per cent vaccines to fight Covid-19, he noted.

Focusing on crisis management during the pandemic, Azami suggested strategies. In order to overcome the negative effects of Covid-19, one should remain penitent, be insulated and do the teamwork. Besides, he should migrate if need be and prevent negative impulses and confront challenges. He must also entertain hopes and

plan ahead. Here, he referred to the Hijrah route of the Prophet (PBUH). By being positive, one could find his brother with hope. Suggesting strategies for crisis management, he said that faith and trust in Allah was the core foundation of such strategies. Patience and perseverance in efforts were also vital to manage the crisis. Referring to economic and counter measures in Islam, he said that for poverty alleviation, the institution of Zakat was engaging the attention of *ulema and imams* to make it more effective. He asked for building partnership with UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), which supported Zakat institutions. Commenting on economic

opportunities for India during the Covid-19 time, he said the country had one of the largest waqf properties in the world. These could generate income and support the poor to be self-reliant. India had some of the richest Muslim entrepreneurs with a heart to donate to the economically deprived and poor people.

Mamoon al-Azami pointed out that three levels of the action plan were needed to be put in place to effectively neutralise the adverse effect of Covid-19. The first was the personal action plan, which sought to care, concern, and commit to helping the poor for the sake of Allah's pleasure and paradise. The second level was the group action plan, which sought to find individuals who had an interest and wanted to be involved and contribute to initiatives to help the poor. Contacting family was another element of the plan.

He said that the third level was the community action plan. Under the community action plan, a steering group of committed and competent community/religious leaders was formed for undertaking community action. A complete list of mosques, madrasas, businesses, NGOs, organisations, colleges, etc., could be drawn up for coordinating the action plan. Besides, sheikhs, professors, key social and community leaders could be asked to play an active role in the task, he noted. Maintaining that 70 per cent of job losses were recorded in the unorganised sector in India, he said that these people needed to be economically engaged in skilled work. They could be helped with equipment and interest-free loan to start their work as carpenters or construction workers. Ways to support them on the ground should be found, he stressed.

Mamoon Al-Azami observed that basic skill training in handling equipment—software and hardware, should be imparted because these areas had much work. He said there was much work for women who were not educated. They had sewing and tailoring businesses at home. Cooking

service, as seen in Bombay, could also be started to support the family. Women could give education to children because they were experts in counselling. They always gave good advice.

In his presidential remarks, Prof. Naushad Ali Azad said that the lecture was very informative and interesting. He held that the pandemic was a global phenomenon. This showed how the world had become globalized. Explaining it further, he said that an African variant of Covid-19 was feared to be found in the UK. It was feared that India could face the third wave of the pandemic.

Referring to the Islamic framework, he quoted Dr. Grave from the US, who said that the American Supreme Court saw the Prophet (PBUH) as one of the greatest lawgivers. He said that the pandemic badly affected the informal sector. A big population living in villages was also affected, but agriculture, being resilient, saved the economy and averted the ill-effects of the pandemic. The stock market was showing up as good as the UK after the pandemic weakened. He suggested that a comprehensive study of the effect of Covid-19 on Muslims and non-Muslims in India and elsewhere be made. He said that India was a big business market and offered much scope for working for the welfare of Muslims.

The lecture ended with Prof. Haseena Hashia proposing a vote of thanks to the attendees.

Book Reviews

Quranic Guidance: Therapy and Islamic Counselling Interventions by Akbar Hussain. New Delhi, Institute of Objective Studies, 2021, pp. 76. ISBN: 9789384973971.

The need for trained Muslim counsellors to serve as chaplains has grown exponentially in our times owing to peoples' modern lifestyles.

And as Islam is an all-embracing way of life that caters for the needs of those in distress, in hospital, prison or at home, the author has accomplished a valuable task in encapsulating both the theory and practice of counselling along the Islamic lines. Being an experienced, professionally trained psychologist, with scores of publications in his field of specialization, Hussain's deliberations on this timely issue, based on primary Islamic sources, are both instructive and highly welcome.

Apart from pressing home the truth that the Qur'an and Sunnah are invaluable sources of divine guidance (pp. 9–22), the author focusses his attention on spelling out the interventions prescribed and permitted by Islam for ameliorating the plight of patients. In this context, he highlights the therapeutic and spiritual benefits of *ibadah* (devotional worship) and *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah). He asserts that the '[p]rayer enhances one physically, socially, emotionally, mentally and spiritually... Performing the prayer was found to be positively correlated with overall well-being... [it] reduced muscle tension, improved cardiovascular and neuro-immunological parameters, enhanced coping skills, [thus] reducing stress, anxiety and depression, and improvement in cognitive functioning' (p. 24). It is so reassuring to note that the above inferences are contingent on clinical, empirical research and evidence. In a similar vein, he underscores a host of positive effects of Qur'anic recitation and meditating on the Qur'an. Equally alleviating for mental disorder patients is the assimilation of such basic Islamic values and traits as piety and unshakable faith in Allah which enables the counselees to formulate 'new ways of behaving, feeling and thinking' (p. 34).

Hussain is unflinchingly persuaded of the effectiveness of Qur'anic recitation as therapy. Empirical studies point to 'a calming effect in 97% of

cases' (p. 35). He illustrates the Qur'anic directives for dealing, on the psychological and spiritual planes, with difficult problems, pain, sickness, stress, fear and other behavioural issues (pp. 39–45). More enlightening and helpful is his elucidation of the Qur'anic advice for managing difficult children, anger control and jealousy. According to him, faith, particularly in the Omniscient Allah and one's answerability on the Day of Judgment, and the Islamic values of perseverance, excellent morals and manners, sincerity and affection towards fellow human beings and remembrance of Allah permeating one's heart and mind, go a long way in helping patients.

Another remarkable component of this book is the helpful advice to counsellors. Once again, this section is premised on Islamic *adab* (social norms). This book will be of much benefit to both professional and general readers. Hussain deserves every credit for presenting the relevant Islamic material of this much-needed domain.

Reviewed by Abdur Raheem Kidwai

Malika B. Mistry (2021). Muslim Women in India: Education and Exposure to Media. New Delhi: Genuine Publications & Media Pvt. Ltd., pp. 212, price INR 895.00.

In the population of India, women constitute a weaker segment and in it Muslim women are the weakest. Yet, they have not attracted scholarly attention. Hence, this book by Malika Mistry covering Muslim women from the closing years of the last century to the early years of the present century with respect to their education and media exposure has not come a day too soon.

The study is based on the critical analysis of the findings of the four rounds of the National Family Health Survey, covering the period from 1992-93 to 2015-16 as well as the Census reports of 2001 and 2011. After these

introductory remarks, the author passes on to the discussion of the socio-economic conditions of the Muslims. She says that poverty is widespread not only among the scheduled castes and tribes, but also among the Muslims. By religious groups, every third Muslim is poor compared with every sixth Christian. The condition of Muslim women is particularly bad. A majority of them lives in urban ghettos and slums, facing drudgery and violence without the basic amenities of housing, water, electricity and sanitation. Nor do they have social security or access to the existing welfare policies of the state. The community is educationally backward owing to economic plight and its children face harassment in schools. Except in Telangana, there is little awareness of the minority scholarship schemes. In the case of girls, the additional problems are lack of schools and colleges in areas where most of them live, stress on religious education, early marriages and male domination. The next chapter deals with the demography of religious groups. Although the Muslims constitute only about 12 per cent of the total Indian population, their absolute number is large so much so that India has the fourth largest Muslim population in the world. State-wise the Muslim population varies with UP heading the list and Mizoram at the bottom.

The next set of chapters deal with the results of the National Family Health Surveys. The first Survey covering 1992-93 showed that in India as a whole, 66 per cent of Muslim women were illiterate with Haryana having the dubious distinction of as much as 98 per cent illiteracy. In Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh the situation was better but still illiteracy was high at around 50 per cent. The second Survey was for the year 1998-99. It found that the Muslim women lagged the most in all the categories of education among the religious groups in different states. They composed of the largest number

of illiterates. As the level of education rose, the gap between the Muslim women and those of other religious groups widened. However, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh fared better than other states. In Kerala where universal literacy was achieved, there were small proportions of illiterates among women of all communities, viz., Hindus, Muslims and Christians. But the disquieting fact was that Muslim women had a higher percentage of illiterates than Hindus and Christians. In addition, in states with a large Muslim population, the situation was worse and Jammu and Kashmir showed the worst picture where the Muslim women were 82 per cent illiterate. In the third Survey it was found that the Muslim women were less likely to be exposed to media vis-à-vis women of other religions. But for listening to the radio programmes, they were the second lowest. Overall, the percentage of women not regularly exposed to any media was the highest among the Muslims. The fourth Survey for 2015-16 found that the Muslim women lagged behind women from other religious groups in almost all the states in school attendance. In the backward states the differentials were large but they were small in the progressive states. In other words, while the benefits of development were wide-spread, full benefits eluded the Muslim women. As for the exposure to media, generally Muslim women were less exposed to any media than those of most other religions. This included newspaper/magazine reading, viewing TV programmes, listening to radio programmes and watching films in theatres. The percentage of women not regularly exposed to any media was the highest among the Muslims.

The author then passes on to the trends in levels of education and exposure to media from NFHS-I to NFHS-IV. As expected, there was a sharp decline in the percentage of illiterate women in all the communities. There was a drastic decline among the Muslim women too.

It is heartening that there has been a sharp increase in the percentage of Muslim women who completed the middle school. In 2015-16, the percentage of women who had studied above the high school level was the lowest among the Muslims. As for the above high school category, while women of all the religions showed a sharp increase from 1992-93 to 2015-16, it was the slowest among the Muslims. As for exposure to various forms of media, there was an overall improvement among women of all the religious groups. But generally the Muslim women exhibited the lowest level of exposure to media.

Changing levels of education from 2001 to 2011 among the women are also examined. While at the all-India level the literacy rate improved for women of all the communities, Muslim women continued to be at the lowest end. In the non-technical diploma category, the highest increase was among the Muslim women. The author suggests that it may be that they opted for courses like diploma in Arabic, Urdu or Persian. She also feels that the Muslims are mostly self-employed and artisans. Hence, it may be easier for them to complete non-technical diplomas.

Finally, there is the conclusion. To bring Muslim and non-Muslim women on par, the educational status of the Muslim women needs to be improved. True, there are scholarships, but their disbursement is delayed. At the lower classes in schools amounts of the scholarships are too meager to be attractive. Computer literacy and self-learning need be promoted. In Urdu speaking areas, more schools should be established and Urdu teachers appointed. Provision of reading rooms and libraries is essential in these areas. Starting of Urdu pre-school classes in schools run by the government should be considered. Above all, Muslims should change their mind set and show more interest in modern scientific education. In addition, data should be collected on the education of Muslims as without it remedial action is not

possible. These are some of the recommendations made which should be helpful in solving the problem of backwardness.

At the same time, there some recommendations which are of doubtful validity. Even if additional reading rooms are established, Muslim women are unlikely to use them along with male readers. On p. 197, the author says, "The Government should establish ITIs, VTCs (vocational training centers), polytechnics, etc., in order to train Muslim youth for employment." Does she mean for Muslim youth? On p. 198, it is mentioned, "Ensure adequate representation for Muslims in Government services and educational institutions including admissions in education." (She quotes two Muslim authors to this end.) This amounts to job reservations for Muslims which is impossible as other religious groups will also demand it and the judiciary has already put a cap on job reservation. On p. 199, she says, "Communalism against Muslims has to be fought as it leads to their ghettoization due to a sense of insecurity." Again, on the same page she suggests, "There is an urgent need for government and the political parties to treat Muslims in general and Muslim women as equal citizens and not as vote-banks." This amounts to arguing that there is a deliberate discrimination against the community in India which has dangerous implications for national polity. Overall the book is a useful study of an Indian minority which will hopefully trigger more studies on these lines.

Reviewed by N. Benjamin

Activities of the IOS Chapters

IOS Kolkata Chapter organises Panel Discussion on "Redefining School Education in the Digital Age"

An online panel discussion on "Redefining School Education in the Digital Age" was organised by the Institute of Objective Studies, Kolkata

Chapter in association with Jibreel International School, Kolkata and supported by Madhubun Educational Books on February 4, 2022. The objective of the discussion was to get the opinion of the experts on the reforms that school education should be looking forward to, especially in the light of the global disruption caused in the last two years when the world battled against the COVID-19 pandemic. The panelists spoke, without mixing words, on the need to adopt the change towards preparing young minds for the future and keeping the schools future-ready so that neither the students nor their education become a victim to any situation like one the world is faced with currently. The panel discussion saw over two hundred educators, teachers and school leaders attending from Kashmir, Jammu, Gujarat, New Delhi, Maharashtra, West Bengal, etc.

The following is the report of the proceedings.

While delivering the introductory remarks, Mr. Abdul Basit Ismail shared the initiative of the Institute of Objective Studies, Kolkata Chapter to conduct a series of webinars/panel discussions to study the various problems that ails the current education system propelled by the disruption caused by the two-long years of lockdown and its aftermath, and consequent online mode of education. The series of discussions, so planned, shall cover school, college and university education. The Institute is aiming at documenting the study, opinions, experiences and expert advice for the entire series to benefit educators, teachers, coordinators and school leaders and help institutions frame policies better.

Extending his warm welcome and acknowledgement to all the panelists for their contribution to the first discussion of this series, Mr. Abdul Basit said that the panelists and all attending educators would agree that the last two years have seen a sea transformation in the way the teaching-

learning transactions have taken place and he has had the pleasure of observing this CHANGE from close quarters at Jibreel International School. He extended his sincere thanks to Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Alam, the Chairman of Institute of Objective Studies, Management of Jibreel International School, Madhubun Educational Books and all educators and school leaders, in his own way addressing them as ‘CHANGE LEADERS’, for making this discussion possible. He concluded his opening remarks quoting George Cuoros – “Change will come our way. We can go through it or we can grow through it. We grow when we seek out solutions rather than let obstacles hinder us” – and calling this discussion a humble initiative to seek solutions.

Mr. Sankhasubha Roy spoke on the agenda ‘*Innovating Education and Educating for Innovation*’. He laid stress on ‘change’ and ‘thinking out of the books’ to make lessons engaging for the students. He also added though change is the need of the hour, all changes should be well-planned and practical, keeping the available infrastructure and the audience in mind. He added that even a simple change, if planned and implemented well, can be very effective. As he has experience of working in different places across the country and abroad, he shared valuable examples to emphasise that different places have different requirements. Further, he also emphasised on the importance of the educator and his/her connection with the students.

While he shared his screen to show the achievements of the students in the online mode and how his team was able to make the experience of the students effective, he also mentioned

that he doesn’t intend to make the teachers model the strategies shared and emphasised on the importance of a teacher to plan things differently. He was of the opinion that it is here that the innovation begins. He further added that it necessarily doesn’t mean one has to employ technology to be innovative but that the objective must be clear, and technology should collaborate if needed for meeting the objectives set forth.

Considering a rise in screen-time of the students in the present situation, he suggested limiting the use of gadgets, and he shared his experiences of introducing Digital Detox Day in his

during the pandemic has been commendable. Speaking on the agenda ‘*Engaging and Empowering Learning through Technology*’, she explained how it is very important as an educator to engage ourselves before engaging our students and the importance of knowing the objective behind using technology. According to her, educators should not use a particular digital tool only just because they have learned it, rather a digital tool should be used to make sure that the concept being taught should remain with the student throughout their life. She explained how these digital tools not only help in interaction but also help the students to be at their creative best.

She took the attendees to an arcade of various digital tools like Padlet, Quizzes, Kahoot, etc., which can be used as a mental velcro. She further illustrated how technology was successfully and effectively used in her school to integrate different subjects with different forms of art when they celebrated

Van Mahotsav, Republic Day, etc. She also shared how they have empowered their students this year by giving them the agency in preparing the school magazine. While giving importance to collaborated classrooms, she emphasised the fact that no technology can replace a good teacher. She added that in order to transform life, all of us should become learners so that we can provide lots of choices to our students and let them decide the technical tools they would like to use with proper justification, keeping the pedagogy in mind. Her demonstrations and illustrations seemed as if they would never cease but she was politely reminded of the time, which left the teachers and educators yearning for more.



A view of the speakers

school to achieve this. He concluded his discussion by talking about the mental well-being of teachers as well as students for carrying out the plans towards educating young minds for innovation.

Mrs. Nupur Ghosh took over the session under a background created by the moderator Mr. Shahjahan who quoted George Couros “Technology will never replace great teachers, but technology in the hands of a great teacher can be transformational,” before asking Mrs. Ghosh to take over. A vice principal at Mahadevi Birla World Academy, Kolkata, Mrs. Ghosh has been heading the academics for years, and her role in implementing the technology-driven teaching strategies

Mrs. Ghosh’s illustrations proved beyond doubt that technology is a powerful tool for maximising engagement among students, and once the students feel engaged, their learning is empowered.

Towards the end, she drew the attention of the attendees to the two most important things that one should keep in mind while using technology – one must follow digital etiquette and never fail to acknowledge the source of information.

The last agenda for the discussion of ‘Getting the Right Blend for Blended Learning’ needed someone with a blend of expertise in pedagogy, psychology and administration, and Mrs. Ruma Purkayastha was just the kind of person. Realising that the virtual house was well informed, she gave a very precise run through over the slides on the various features of the blended learning approach and insightfully shared her mantra for the right blend. In her opinion, the right blend has only two facets – technology must be mapped with pedagogy, and it must be realistic.

The blend of learning should be in order to make the process more productive. While blending, we should keep the needs of our learners in mind. Also, what they are learning, where they are from and how tech savvy they are should be given equal importance. Then, with a series of colourful slides, she explained the need to develop a social connect among the students and

how to use different teaching techniques digitally. She made the listeners understand how we can involve, engage and understand our students by giving them choices. She added that we should leverage experiences to design meaningful activities.

She laid emphasis on giving authority to students by guiding them, as the saying goes – “tell them where to look, but not what to see!” She believes that education is not limited to a classroom and hence the blended learning approach is the best approach in the 21st century, and schools should be ready to adopt the methodology for the education of the whole child for the whole world as it combines the strengths of both traditional and digital learning matched.

As a well-being mentor, she looks at teachers as individuals who can help students, as many as they can, to embark on a happy, shared and successful journey of education. In conclusion, she stated that “going blended” is not just about the use of technology; it is about rethinking instruction and effectively managing innovation over time.

Lastly Prof. Z. M. Khan, who had been a patient listener to an hour-long discussion, shared his pearls of wisdom, insisting the role of a teacher isn’t limited to teaching but that it extends to being a role model in the lives of the students. He shared his personal experiences to prove how

education and educators help in grooming one’s personality.

He flipped through the pages of history to cite an example from our late President, Dr. Zakir Hussain and his philosophy of open madrasah and drew a parallel to the methodologies adopted in the wake of the pandemic. He was, however, of the opinion that engagement cannot be prescribed as each student is a unique individual and so are the teachers themselves. Hence, the diversity and the flexibility that the new blended learning approach could pave the way for the innovation and empowered learning in the digital era. Schools, therefore, need to redefine the curriculum requirements, the paraphernalia and resource persons for their appropriate delivery.

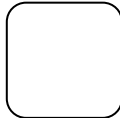
In conclusion, Prof. Khan cautioned the attendees that in India, it is difficult to follow a yardstick of the teaching-learning process because of the given diversity, hence while schools redefine their policies, it must be kept in mind that democratisation and liberalisation of education is the need of the hour, more so, in the post-COVID world.

In the end Mrs. Sanchita Bose, representing Madhubun Educational books, presented the vote of thanks to all stakeholders, including the teachers and educators.

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