

# CO-OPERATIVE STRUCTURE FOR THE PUBLICATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF ISLAMIC BOOKS.

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The importance and significance of seeking knowledge or *ilm* is established throughout the ages. People have been acquiring and diffusing knowledge even at the time when there were no printing facilities nor publishing agencies, and when not many people knew how to read or write. In fact, it seems to be an essential part of the human nature to seek knowledge. Adam superseded angels due primarily to the fact that he learnt whatever God taught to him, and in turn satisfactorily answered to God when asked certain questions. As the *Qur'an* says:-

"And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; He said: Tell Me the names of those if you are right. They said: Glory be to Thee: We have no Knowledge but that which Thou has taught us. Surely Thou are the knowing, the Wise. He said: O Adam, inform them of their names. So when informed them of their names. He said: Did I not say to you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth? And I know what you manifest and what you hide..(1)

It must be remembered here that throughout this passage of the *Qur'an*, Adam stands for man generally, and that man got the superiority over angels on account of his great knowledge and wisdom. Teaching Adam the names, signifies the vast capacity of man and the superiority of his knowledge to that of angels.

Islam, a great religion of mankind, lays great emphasis on acquiring knowledge, reading and writing. It is rather striking when one realizes the fact that at the time when the *Qur'an* was ordering to read and write, the Arabs were an *Ummi* nation who made no use of reading and writing, and the use of writing was a rare thing in the Arabian peninsula. The very first revelation which the Prophet (peace be upon him) received starts with the order *Iqra* or to read. The significance of this order is further expressed in verse 3 with the addition of the words that "thy Lord is most generous" which shows that it is through reading and writing that man can attain the position of glory. While verse 4 reads that it is by the use of *Qalam* or pen that knowledge can be acquired and spread.

The *Qur'an* Says:-

"Read in the name of thy Lord who creates... Read and thy Lord is most Generous who thought by the Pen." (2).

The mention of *Qalam* in the very first revelation is quite significant for the Muslims. It implies that for propagating the knowledge of the Divine Unity, and for guarding the revelation which was to be granted to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) pen or writing was a powerful instrument. And it is a fact that the pen

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has played an important role in the propagation of Islamic teachings as well as in the protection of the *Qur'an* against corruption of every sort. There are many other verses in the Quran regarding reading, writing and spreading knowledge which prove that Islam has laid emphasis on documentation by writing to facilitate more effective communication of knowledge.

The prophet (peace be upon him) too, greatly emphasized on the propagation of knowledge and he is reported to have said that

"Pass on information from me, even if it is only a verse of the Quran (3)".

Similarly Abu Huraira is reported to have said that the prophet (peace be upon him) said.

"Among the actions and good deeds for which a believer will continue to receive reward after his death is knowledge which he taught and spread".(4)

In short, to read, write and diffuse knowledge to others is the duty of every Muslim. In the past this duty was performed by the muslims calligraphers who produced excellent artistic texts on a large scale. Nevertheless, in 1727 a printing press was established in Constantinople with the condition that the Quran should not be printed. The publication of the first book, however, aroused such opposition that printing was practically abandoned in Islamic World for about a century (5).

On the contrary, printing and publishing flourished in Europe at least as early as the Roman Empire. Until the late 18th century in Britain and well into the 19th century in the United States, the publisher was initially a printer. In the 18th century the responsibility for issuing books began in Britain to be assumed by the large booksellers rather than the printer, and by the end of that century publishing had emerged as an independent function in much of its modern form.

In the modern organization of the book trade, the function of the publisher is quite distinct from both that of printer and binder who manufacture books, and that of jobber and retail book-store through which they are sold. Modern publisher has an eye of a craftsman, and stands to gain, if he has had experience in printing, book-binding and all the allied processes of the craft. He contracts with the author for the right to issue the book; designs the physical form of the book and contracts for its manufacture; promotes its sale through the distribution of review copies, advertising, maintaining a sales force, announcements to the trade and similar means; maintains the stock of copies; and handles sales both to wholesalers and retail book-stores, and, on occasion, by mail to individual publishers

The modern publishing industry in the Western World is highly organised. There are different publishing houses which produce material in different fields. Most major religious faiths maintain official publishing houses which produce Bibles, hymnals and liturgical works as well as general works on religious subjects. Many private publishers too, serving particular religious departments of

general publishing firms, produce similar works which are sold to churches and as well as through the general trade. In fact, this is the largest field of publishing, specializing on a subject basis.

Books in scientific, technical, and commercial fields are usually produced by specialized firms and are extensively sold by mail and through larger general book stores. Publishing in the field of medicine and law is even more specialized; whereas textbooks and related educational materials come under a separate house.

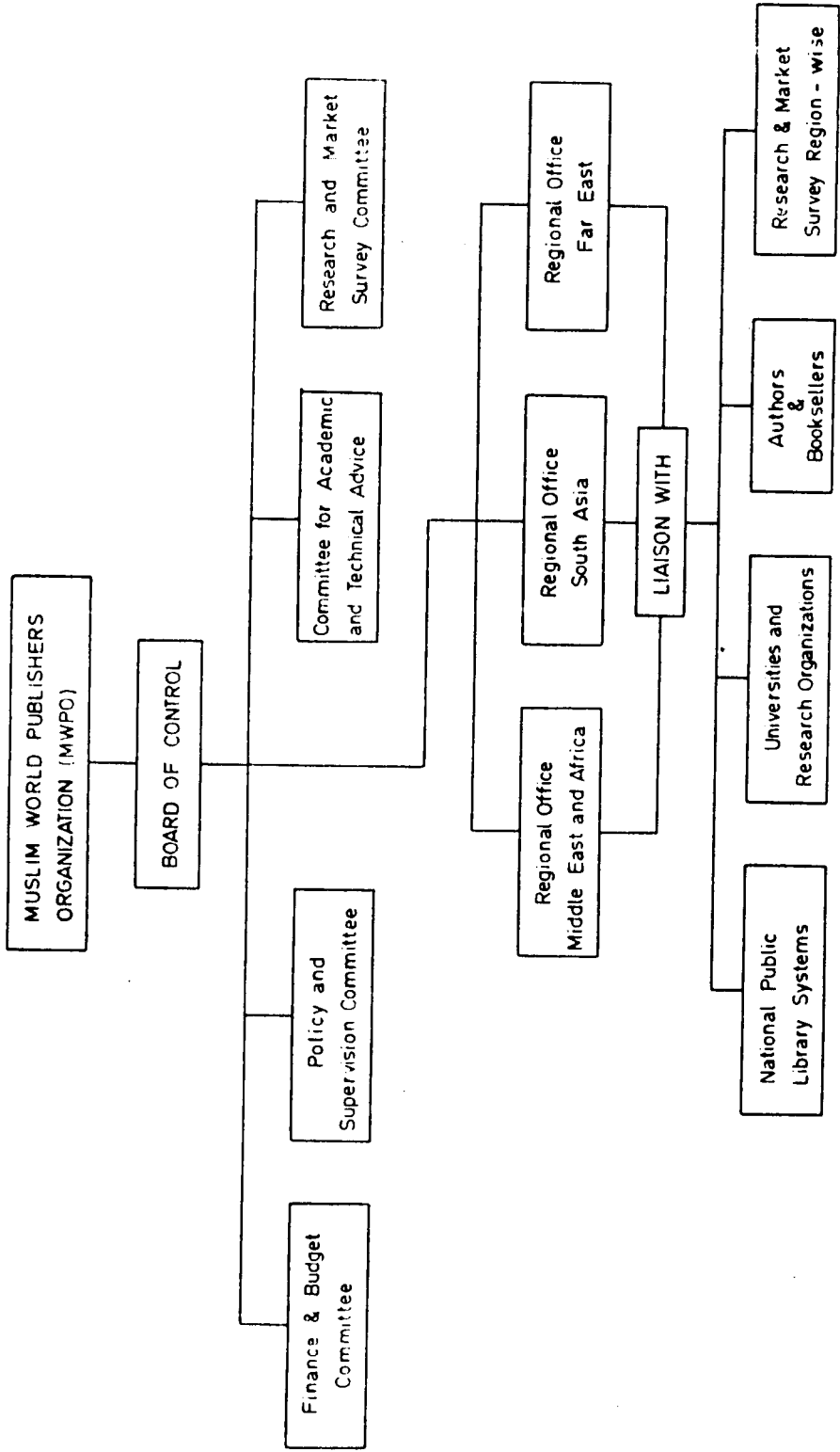
The highly advanced system of publication in the United States, Northern Europe in general and Britain in particular is due to better ordering and specializing of the booksops, the greater know how of the booksellers, and the development of libraries, particularly the public libraries, and certain organizations. The publisher/Author organizations have played a significant role in this field. They draw certain principles and master-plans for both the author and publisher to bring about a better understanding of the conditions effecting author and publisher, on both sides.

Although Islam laid emphasis on the propagation of knowledge, it is unfortunate that printing and publishing is not very developed in Muslim countries. The reasons may be manifold. In the opinion of the author the main cause is the lack of organization and cooperation among the publishers in every field related to the agency of publication. In many Muslim countries the work is being done in isolation. There is no planning and coordination as such among the Muslim countries. It is, in fact, our hard luck that inspite of having monetary resources, modern technology and means of communication, we are not producing many standard books on Islam. By making use of the modern technology we must spread knowledge, especially the revelatory knowledge throughout the world on a large scale. Books in general as well as the *Qur'an* and its *Tafseer* in particular, should be published in different Languages of the world. Masterplan of publications on different aspects of Islam, such as, the *Qur'an*, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, *Dawa*, Islamic economics, politics and Social Sciences etc. should be well prepared. There should be a constant check and mechanism to counter against publications of literature derogatory to Islam. Efforts should be made to create friendly relations among author, publisher and bookseller.

The foresaid aims cannot be achieved unless we, the Muslims, draw some basic principles regarding publication. It is to be noted that when the word publication is used it means all the procedure of processing a book until it comes to the market and is sold to a common reader. Before we think of a wider circulation of Islamic books in Western countries, we should unite ourselves first and try to see which type of material we are to offer to those who are supposed to learn about Islam and Islamic culture from its believers. Our material must have a certain standard to be willingly and readily accepted and read by others.

The cooperation among the publishers of Muslim countries can be obtained by setting up a Muslim World publishers Organization (MWPO) somewhere in the Muslim World, for which an organizational set up has been proposed in Fig. 1. Its

FIGURE 1: PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL SET UP OF MWPO



regional offices can be established in two or three different Muslim countries, depending on the language and geographical conditions. For example one regional office may be set up in South Asia, the other in the Middle East and Africa and the third in Far East. The NWPO should have a liaison with all the publishers in Muslim countries, and it should have information of the materials produced by them. The MWPO in consultation with all the publishers, can frame policies and principles to be followed. It can not be expected from the publishers to publish the books at their own expenses. However, they can be persuaded to produce the material at a reasonable price so that more people can have an access.

Sometimes, it happens that publishers do not take much interest in publishing those books which, according to their mind, may not have a "good market". The publishers should be motivated to change their attitude by making them realize the importance of their role which they can play in the diffusion of Islamic knowledge. In this regard the MWPO can set a criterion on which the prices may be fixed. The MWPO can raise a fund to subsidize the possible losses incurred by any publisher in the process of bringing out some given material. The establishment of public Libraries can also be helpful in persuading the publishers to take risk of producing those books which may not have a good return. It may be clarified that in the established system of Public Libraries, the books printed by publishing Houses are lifted in big numbers thereby providing financial cushion to meet the financial problem of selling a particular book in the market. In muslim countries the public library system can be introduced under the sponsorship of Munciple Corporations, District Councils and *Zakat* Councils.

To avoid repetition, all the publishers, be affiliated with the proposed MWPO, can send regularly the list of their publications to the regional offices of the organization. Under the supervision of Organization, there must be held regular meetings and seminars in which publishers of all Muslim countries should participate to highlight the problems and difficulties in publishing. Scholars from different countries may also be invited in the seminars to read papers on different aspects related to book-writing, book-production, book distribution and book preservation etc.

Cooperation among the publishers of different Muslim countries can also solve the problem of language. There are certainly many important works on Islam which are not available in Western languages and thus are confined to only a few Muslim countries. The Organization can build a separate wing for translating the standard books on Islam into European Languages.

In short, with the help of MWPO the publishers of Muslim countries can unite themselves and try to maintain certain standard of their production. If we succeed in producing standard books on Islam under a well planned system, it is not difficult to find a good market for them in other countries.

To have the cooperation of other publishers we can, with the help of Muslims living in those countries, build small publishing houses. These houses may not only publish books on the fundamentals of Islam, but will also provide necessary information pertaining to the scope of printing more Islamic material at a large

scale, as well as ways and means for establishing better relations with non-muslim publishers. Muslim publishers should send regularly the list of their publications, and if possible some books to the publishers of other countries in order to make them aware of the general standard and style of their books. Publishers living in other countries may be prompted to cooperate through dealers and booksellers. If the booksellers are willing to keep and sell books on Islam, the publishers will import these books from Muslim countries, or if the demand is greater, they can even publish themselves. Cooperation can also be obtained through the customers, if somehow, we can manage to persuade them to buy more books on Islam. If the demand is high publishers will be bound to pay attention to the demand. However, how people can be persuaded to buy more books on Islam requires application of rigorous strategies of marketing.

As was mentioned earlier, standard of publications needs to be substantially improved as a first pre-requisite in this direction. The Muslim publishers need to be clear about the basic theme or plan through which they may be able to demonstrate the real picture of Islam through a systematic publication activity. The MWPO should seek advice from other organizations in the western World and arrange regular meetings with them. It can also arrange international seminars in which authors, publishers and book sellers from Muslim and non-Muslim countries should be encouraged to find appropriate channels for participation to discuss different issues related to publishing.

These are some ideas which may be thought provoking insofar as the establishment of MWPO and its areas of work are concerned. There must be many other ways to approach the subject, but the fact remains that the Muslims are far behind and too slow in making progress in this significant field of knowledge.

### REFERENCES

1. *Al Qur'an* 2: 31-33
2. *Ibid*, 96: 1-4
3. *Mishkat al Masabih*, Kitab al 'ilm. Sh. Mohammad Ashraf Lahore, 1960.
4. *Ibid*.
5. *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* Vol. XI-XII, P-408

### يا ابن آدم

عن أنس رضي الله عنه قال: سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول: «قال الله تعالى: (يا ابن آدم انك ما دعوتني ورجوتني... غفرت لك ما كان منك ولا أبالي، يا ابن آدم.. لو بلغت ذنوبك عنان السماء ثم استغفرتني غفرت لك، يا ابن آدم.. لو أتيتني بقراب الأرض خطايا ثم أتيتني لا تشرك بي شيئا لأتيتك بقرابها مغفرة)»  
رواه الترمذي.