The importance of education is quite clear. Education is the knowledge of putting one’s potentials to maximum use. One can safely say that a human being is not in the proper sense till he is educated.

This importance of education is basically for two reasons. The first is that the training of a human mind is not complete without education. Education makes man a right thinker. It tells man how to think and how to make decision.

The second reason for the importance of education is that only through the attainment of education, man is enabled to receive information from the external world; to acquaint himself with past history and receive all necessary information regarding the present to prepare for the future events. Without education, man is as though in a closed room and with education he finds himself in a room with all its windows open towards outside world.

This is why Islam attaches such great importance to knowledge and education. When the Qur’an began to be revealed, the first word of its first verse was ‘Iqra’ that is, read. Education is thus the starting point of every human activity.

A scholar (alim) is accorded great respect in the hadith. According to a hadith the ink of the pen of a scholar is more precious than the blood of a martyr. The reason being that a martyr is engaged in defence work while an alim (scholar) builds individuals and nations along positive lines. In this way he bestows a real life to the world.

The Qur’an repeatedly asks us to observe the earth and the heavens. This instills in man a desire to learn natural science. All the books of hadith have a chapter on knowledge (ilm). In Sahih Bukhari there is a chapter entitled “The virtue of one who acquires ilm (learning) and imparts that to others.”

How great importance is attached to learning in Islam can be understood from an event in the life of the Prophet. At the battle of Badr in which the Prophet gained victory over his opponents, seventy people of the enemy rank were taken prisoner. These prisoners of war were literate people. In order to benefit from their education the Prophet declared that if one prisoner teaches ten Medinan children how to read and write, this will serve as his ransom and he will be set free.

This was the first school in the history of Islam established by the Prophet himself with all its teachers being non-Muslims. Furthermore, they were all war prisoners. There was all the risk that after their release they will again create problems for Islam and Muslims. This Sunnah of the Prophet shows that education is to be received whatever the risk involved.

On the one hand Islam places great emphasis on learning, on the other, all those factors which are necessary to make progress in learning have provided by God. One of these special factors is the freedom of research. One example of it is that in Makkah, the birthplace of the Prophet, dates were not grown. Afterwards the Prophet migrated to Medina, the city of dates. One day the Prophet saw that some people were atop the date trees busy in doing something. On being asked what they were engaged in, they replied that they were pollinating.

The Prophet suggested them not to do so. The following year date yield was considerably very low. The Prophet enquired them of the reason. They told him that the date crop depended on pollination. Since he suggested them to do otherwise, they had refrained from that. The Prophet then told them to go on doing as they used to, and that, “You know the worldly matters better than me.”

In this way, the Prophet of Islam separated scientific research from religion. This meant that in the world of nature, man must enjoy full opportunity to conduct free research and adopt the conclusions arrived at after the research. Placing such great emphasis on knowledge.

This process began in Makkah, then it reached to Medina and Damascus, afterwards it found its center in Baghdad. Ultimately it entered Spain. Spain flourished with extraordinary progress made in various academic and scientific disciplines. This flood of scientific progress entered Europe and ultimately resulted in producing the modern scientific age.