

Need for Going Back to Islamic Traditional System of Education

*Dr. Muhammad Zaid Malik**

*Ms. Alia Jabeen,***

Abstract:

What is education? What is its objective? What are its means of acquiring? What were the main features of our Traditional System of Education? How and when did we lose our traditional system of education? While answering these questions this paper discusses the ways how may we, the teachers, apply innovation while going back to sub-continental Islamic traditional system of education. The paper will take the Prophetic model of education as the ideal role model.

Keywords: Education, Innovation, Objective, Tradition, Role Model.

Introduction

The primary source of the protection of any nation and its culture is its education. Education and teaching are words that are not unknown to any society. However, when it is defined, varying definitions come into view. The literal meaning of education is: “the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment and generally preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life.”¹

According to John Davy (1859-1956) it is “the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfill his possibilities”.²

Plato says “Education develops in the body and in the soul (of the pupil), all the beauty and all the perfection of which he is capable of.”³

Imam Abu Hanifah says on education: “it means understanding of what makes or mars a soul: and learning something without putting it into practice is meaningless, one should therefore, know how to distinguish between right and wrong in regard to both this world and the hereafter and should choose the right conduct, so that his misguided intellect may not lead him astray and consequently Allah’s wrath may not fall on him.”⁴

* King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

** PhD Scholar, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan

Shah Wali Ullah said: “Education is to recognize the Haq (truth) and shar (evil) and to adopt the truth and condemn the evil.”⁵

Islamic Concept of Education

According to the study of Quran and Hadith, the basic education is that which helps a person to achieve his purpose in life, whether that may be worldly or religious knowledge. According to the Qur’an, the purpose of life is Divine worship:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”⁶

According to Islamic education, in an Islamic country, the education should be such through which beneficial people are prepared for the Islamic country, and that may work as experts and workers in different fields according to modern requirements and represent the real image of Islam through their thought and actions. Professor Ameer Malik has discussed this matter in his article:

“The working environment of Islamic education is vaster than the concept of Islamic knowledge. Through education, not only are the basic concepts and beliefs of the society corrected in the light of Divine commands, the character of an individual is developed in such a way that he/she may live his/her individual and communal lives in a successful manner. It promotes his/her hidden abilities in such a way that it provides experts in each field of life that possess ethical and righteous qualities that are essential in a Muslim along with the sense of accountability in the Hereafter and running the modern state.”⁷

According to Dr. Mushtaq ur Rahman Siddiqui, there are some bases of the Islamic Education⁸:

1. Theoretical Basis of Islamic Education

The basic point of Islamic education states that this world has not been created on its own but has been created by Allah according to His plan, and that prophets and human beings are His viceroys. The purpose of life is the worship of Allah. In Islamic education, the basic philosophy of life is based on Islamic belief and objectives. In the Holy Qur’an, four main points make up the basis of Islamic thought:

- i. The recitation of the verses of the Qur’an
- ii. *Tazkiyah* (Purification)
- iii. Knowledge of the Book (Qur’an)
- iv. Art of Wisdom

What does education mean in Islam? This can be answered through this Qur'anic verse:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ
وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ

“Certainly did Allah confer [great] favor upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom.”⁹

This Ayat proves that education in the eyes of Islam is what contains these four elements.

2. Social Basis of Islamic Education

The specialty of Islamic education is that it gives importance to the unique characteristics of Islamic society. The primary importance should be given to the supreme power of Allah (SWT). Equality and unity amongst humans should be the main base of education. In the Islamic education, each individual feels a sense of communal responsibility, and the notion of individuality does not exist. This system imposes on each individual the duty of *Amr bil-Ma'ruf wa nahy an-il-Munkar* (Commanding good and forbidding evil).

3. Economic Basis of Islamic Education

In the eyes of Islam, the economic basis of education is the pursuit of lawful earnings and abstaining from the earning which is unlawful. Islam emphasizes greatly on struggle and hard work for attaining one's livelihood.

4. Psychological Basis of Islamic Education

From an Islamic point of view, the fundamental psychological basis of education is that a child should be brought up in such a manner that is able to break free from the bonds of the desires of his own self and attain a pious tranquil soul.

Islamic Educational System and Its Objectives

Islam provides a complete code of life, and within this very code of life, where it discusses rituals and practices, it also lays the foundations of an Islamic system of education. Elaborating on this system of education, Syed Abul-A'laa Maududi, while deeming the current system of education as in need of reform, said¹⁰:

1. The foremost thing that we must determine is the purpose of education. Each nation has its own world view and way of life, and it tailors its system of education according to it. Now the purpose of our education must be to prepare such people who are well acquainted with our national heritage and our religion – and what is our national heritage but

our religion – have complete conviction in it and have strong and trustworthy characters in accordance with it.

2. The second principle for the educational system should be that the dividing line between religious and secular educations should be erased.
3. The third principle for this system should be that character building takes precedence over learning bookish knowledge. Our purposes would not be accomplished by merely producing a well-read expert in the fields of knowledge and science. Rather, what we need is to give birth to Islamic thought and mentality in each of our youth, be he a scientist or master of sociology.

The Means of Acquiring Knowledge in Islam

Knowledge and education hold primary importance in our lives, so the question must necessarily arise, what is the source of knowledge, and how do we acquire it. We obtain all of our knowledge, concerning both material and immaterial things from four sources:

1. Sensory Organs
2. Intellect
3. Intuition
4. Revelation

Revelation is one such source of knowledge that is free from the faults of senses, intellect and intuition. It is not dependent upon the mind like intellect, nor does it depend upon the material world like the senses, and neither does it require the experience of intuition. For this reason, it is considered the most authentic source of knowledge, and it is through it that mankind can be drawn from the darkness to the light.

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ. يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ
وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book. By which Allah guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings them out from darkness into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path.¹¹

What were the main features of our traditional system of education?

1. Teachers were free from bias of race, ethnicity and language.
2. According to Islamic education, a teacher cannot be one who simply teaches from assigned course books. Rather, a teacher is more like a missionary whose mission is to ensure that the Islamic knowledge, beliefs and values are passed on to the next generations with utmost trustworthiness.

3. In Islamic education, the teacher is the embodiment of education because the Prophet (SAW) would not only teach through words, but also through his every action and gesture.
4. Both knowledge and upbringing are included in Islamic education, through which education is not simply a means to gain information but also to instill in the students ethical mannerisms.
5. In an Islamic educational system, teachers are not answerable to any institution, rather the Masjid itself serves as the university, and it is only through this that the students may be truly successful.
6. In Islamic education, teachers do not adopt teaching in a professional attitude; rather, they treat their students like their own children. History bears witness to the number of teachers that have funded their students' education from their own pockets.
7. In an Islamic educational system, equality between students is given particular importance. There is no distinction between the rich, poor, villager or city-dweller; all are taught the same syllabus, in the same manner, providing equal opportunities for all.

How and when did we lose our traditional system of education?

After completely spreading the light of Islamic faith in the Arabic world, Muslims turned to other countries, so as to bring them out from the darkness and set them onto the path of humanity. After conquering a nation, their first priority was to spread knowledge. During the era of the rightly guided caliphs, the reign of Umar (RA) was conspicuous in that it gave rise to the development of a system of education. In all of the conquered territories, Makatib (schools usually attached to a Masjid) were set up for the sole purpose of primary education, where Qur'an, ethical norms, and language arts were taught. The knowledgeable amongst the Sahabah were appointed in each of the provinces to teach Fiqh and hadith. In these Makatib, which were presented in every city and where several of the Sahabah were stationed, the method of learning was that they would sit in Masjid where people would come and ask questions, the answering of which would be beneficial to all. Also, they would narrate Ahadith and give talks while sitting in these circles. The year 409 A.H. (1066 A.D.) was a monumental year in the history of Islamic education as it was then that the first Madaris were made. Due to the increased amount of students, it became incumbent that a new system be set up, solely for the purpose of education, where knowledge, both religious and secular would be imparted. Here, Qur'an was taken as a text and its grammar and content as well as hadith were taught as important constituents of the syllabus.¹²

Islamic learning under the East India Company

Since the middle of the 18th century the East India Company was gradually gaining power, but all of the major posts were still in the hands of

the Muslims. Thus, Dr. Hunter in his book, “Hamaray Hindustani Musalman”, writes that Muslims under their own system of education were the most advanced and highest in the society. For the first 75 years of their rule, the Company made no change in the system of education for the sake of proper running of the colony. However, they slowly started their own system parallel to the Muslim one. Then, when a new generation had been born into the new system, they abolished the old Muslim system and replaced it with their own, and so the door closed on all types of official government jobs for those who had studied under the previous system.¹³

English Education:

In 1823, a committee was formed by the East India Company (EIC) that was to conduct some research on general education and give some suggestions to promote education. Thus, in 1824, and 1829, respectively, Sanskrit College and Delhi College for Arabic and Persian Studies were inaugurated. Study of the English language, however, was kept optional which was fully exploited by the Hindus. Lord

Macaulay writes: “Teaching of English language is the government’s duty. The English language will open the doors of the developed sciences of the West for the people of India and there will come a time when the ideology and culture of the Indians will be almost completely Western.”¹⁴

As time progressed there was a deliberate attempt to reduce Muslims to the lowest level in society, including the removal of Persian as official language and the fact that thirty times more wealth was spent on the education of Hindus as compared to the Muslims.

It was then, that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan began his Aligarh Movement. He believed that Muslims had no other choice but to accept British education and then compete with the Hindus for official posts or else, Muslims would become the most downtrodden people in society. However, he believed that Muslims should not forget who they were, that is Muslims, and thus, they should also obtain religious education side by side with British secular education. He proposed the two-nation theory which stated that Muslims and Hindus were two independent nations with their own ways, religions and cultures. Thus, they were incompatible with each other, and could not co-exist peacefully and it was under this banner that Pakistan as we know it came into existence.

Unfortunately, however, the system of education left over by the British was not amended. An addition of Islamic studies as a subject was thought to be enough, leaving the whole system that had originally been designed to suit the ends of the British.

Complying with the most recent educational policies, the English language is to be made the medium for education although it is only schools in the private sector that are doing so to date, where course books as well are

all published by Oxford, Cambridge, or other foreign writers, for example, from Singapore etc. Western curriculum is taught in most private schools, English being the medium of instruction. Here, the official government educational curriculum is not encouraged, but rather looked down upon. Frequented majorly by the rich, these private schools usually offer O Levels and A Levels which being organized by the British sound superior to many. This particular segment of society believes that it is only through this type of education that the nation can develop and prosper.

Traditional Way of Education in Islam

Before the advent of Islam, in Christian, Jewish and Buddhist cultures, the only literates were their priests and religious scholars. Amongst the Arabs too, literacy was not very common. At the time of the Prophet (SAW), a mere seventeen people knew how to read and write. They held literature and poetry in very high regard but the concept of a book did not prevail. The first book in the history of the Arabs was The Holy Qur'an. As soon as the Quran was revealed to the Muslims, learning and teaching became an important part of their lives. The Arabs participated in these intellectual activities with great enthusiasm and the door to knowledge was open to all and in this manner, educational revolution came about in the world. The religion of Islam gave rise to new subjects and methodologies of education. Islam's syllabus consisted of The Holy Quran -that Allah the Almighty Himself taught to the Prophet (SAW), after which the Prophet (SAW) passed on all these teachings to his companions.

Keeping in mind the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, we will discuss the traditional ways of teaching in Islam:

Quranic way of Education

Allah (SWT), in the Quran, instructed human beings to teach in the following manners:

1. Order to read and write

In Islam, knowledge holds a primary position. Since Islam is the religion of guidance, it is also referred to as the religion of knowledge. In the first revelation of the Quran, the Prophet (SAW) was ordered to read and write.

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ
عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

“Read in the name of your Lord who has created. He has created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is Most Generous. Who has taught man by the pen. Taught that which he knew not.”¹⁵

This first revelation established a base for the methods of reading, writing and understanding.

2. Tafakkur and Tadabbur (pondering and reflecting)

Allah (SWT) did not focus on simply settling for all that was sent down in the form of Wahi (revelation), in fact, He encouraged thinking and pondering over the universe through observation and coming to one's own conclusions.

قُلْ أَنْظُرُوا مَاذَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

“Say you, 'behold what is in the heavens and in the earth'¹⁶

3. Argumentative way (Istidlaal)

Amongst the different ways of teaching highlighted in the Quran, one method is explaining by presenting an argument. For example, the Quran mentions how Prophet Ibrahim (AS) left Nimrud, the King speechless with his tactfully presented arguments. Allah talks about this event in Surah Al-Baqarah.

قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ

And Ibrahim said: "Allah makes the sun rise from the East; so you make it rise from the West," and dumbfounded was the infidel."¹⁷

4. An Analysis of History

An important topic of the Holy Quran is the narration of the history of the past nations. Allah, first narrates the stories of these nations and then, asks us to take heed from their untimely ends. The tales of the people of Aad, Thamud and Lut have been told in various instances in the Quran, the story of the Pharaoh and Prophet Musa (AS) having been narrated in great detail. This tradition of the Quran is equally prominent and effective. When the Quran talks about the rise and fall of these nations, intellectuals come to their conclusions.

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ كَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ فُؤَادًا
وَأَثَارُوا الْأَرْضَ وَعَمَرُوهَا أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا عَمَرُوهَا وَجَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ
لِيُظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَكِن كَانُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

“Have they not traveled through the earth and observed how was the end of those before them? They were greater than them in power, and they plowed the earth and built it up more than they have built it up, and their messengers came to them with clear evidences. And Allah would not ever have wronged them, but they were wronging themselves.”¹⁸

5. Education through travelling

The Quran has commanded Muslims to gain knowledge and understanding in several different ways. On one hand, the Prophet (SAW) gained this deep understanding in the secluded Cave of Hira, on the other he

was ordered to travel the land far and wide to truly recognize his Lord. An example of this is apparent in the Holy Quran in Surah Al Ankaboot:

قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ بَدَأَ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ اللَّهُ يُنشِئُ النَّشْأَةَ الْآخِرَةَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

Say, [O Muhammad], "Travel through the land and observe how He began creation. Then Allah will produce the final creation. Indeed Allah, over all things, is competent."¹⁹

6. Incentives and Disincentives (Targheeb and Tarheeb)

Another way of teaching in the Quran is through the concept of reward and punishment; the promise of a good outcome for good deeds and a bad outcome in exchange for evil deeds. In Surah Naml, Allah (SWT) gives glad tidings to the immigrants in this way:

وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا فِي اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا ظَلَمُوا لَنُبَوِّئَنَّهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَلَا نُجْزِيَ الْآخِرَةَ أَكْبَرَ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

"And those who emigrated for [the cause of] Allah after they had been wronged - We will surely settle them in this world in a good place; but the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if only they could know."²⁰

7. Contemplation on Nature

Islam is the religion based on nature, and second only to revelation, the primary source of Islamic knowledge is nature. After an in depth study of the Quran, we can conclude that all scientific studies originate invariably from the Quran. For example, Surah Yasin emphasizes to pay attention to the workings of the universe; the sun, moon and their orbits':

وَأَيَّةٌ لَهُمُ اللَّيْلُ نَسْلَخُ مِنْهُ النَّهَارَ فَإِذَا هُمْ مُظْلِمُونَ. وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ هِيَ ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ. وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ. لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ.

"And a sign for them is the night. We remove from it [the light of] day, so they are [left] in darkness. And the sun runs [on course] toward its stopping point. That is the determination of the Exalted in Might, the Knowing. And the moon - We have determined for it phases, until it returns [appearing] like the old date stalk. It is not allowable for the sun to reach the moon, nor does the night overtake the day, but each, in an orbit, is swimming."²¹

8. Explanation of Halal and Haraam

The Quran is not only a book of beliefs and rituals, it is a guidebook to lead a complete way of life. Whatever may be harmful for human beings, Allah has openly forbidden in the Quran. Allah says:

إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلَ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ.

“He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.”²²

9. Repetition

In the Quran, Allah generally repeats whatever is worth emphasis, however, every repetition is narrated in a different manner to deliver the message. The stories of prophets and the behaviors of their people have been narrated in the Quran repeatedly. Similarly, in terms of worships, prayer, holding the topmost importance had been mentioned about one hundred times in the Quran, to emphasize this significance. This shows that repetition is an effective tool to instill in the learner what is being stressed upon.

10. Giving small examples

In the Quran, Allah has placed great importance to the human psychology by giving examples from their daily lives. He gives the example of honey bees in Surah Nahl and talks of spiders in Surah Ankaboot.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ

“Indeed, Allah is not timid to present an example - that of a mosquito or what is smaller than it. And those who have believed know that it is the truth from their Lord. But as for those who disbelieve, they say, "What did Allah intend by this as an example?" He misleads many thereby and guides many thereby. And He misleads not except the defiantly disobedient.”²³

11. Emphasis on the use of senses

All the knowledge that human beings have accumulated to date, basically depends on the use of their senses. The Quran also stresses on the use of sight and hearing. Allah says:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَتَكُونَ لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ يَعْقِلُونَ بِهَا أَوْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

“So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts.”²⁴

12. Motivating Questioning

Allah (SWT) appreciates pondering and asking questions because questions only arise when the need for the answer is great. In the Quran, Allah Himself commands the Prophet (SAW) to ask questions:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الدِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“And We sent not before you, [O Muhammad], except men to whom We revealed [the message], so ask the people of the message if you do not know.”²⁵

This Ayah clearly indicates that if one is not knowledgeable in some area, he should inquire about it.

13. Importance of the practical implementation of knowledge

Knowledge without application, in Islam, is a burden. In Surah Jumuah, Allah refers to the example of such people as donkeys:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْرَةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوهَا كَمَثَلِ الْحِمَارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفَارًا بِئْسَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

“The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books]. Wretched is the example of the people who deny the signs of Allah. And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.”²⁶

14. Acquiring knowledge step by step

According to human psychology, it is natural to accept the prevailing knowledge and customs so newer or different information is generally harder to accept right away. In consideration of this psychology, Allah (SWT) did not demand a drastic transformation, but slow and gradual changes instead. An example of this can be seen in the Holy Quran, where Allah forbade the consumption of alcohol, not all at once, but in three different stages so that it was easier for the people to get accustomed to.

15. Imaginative Qualities

The Holy Quran awakens the creative and imaginative parts of the human brain, causing it to visualize the unseen, especially when the Quran conjures

up images of the Hereafter, it stirs the imaginative qualities of the brain. For example, Allah says in Surah Al Takweer:

إِذَا السَّمَاسُ كُوِّرَتْ. وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ.
وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ. وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ. وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ. وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ
سُئِلَتْ. بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ .

“When the sun is wrapped up [in darkness]. And when the stars fall, dispersing. And when the mountains are removed. And when full-term she-camels are neglected. And when the wild beasts are gathered. And when the seas are filled with flame. And when the souls are paired. And when the girl [who was] buried alive is asked. For what sin she was killed.”²⁷

16. Differentiating between right and wrong

In Islam, the purpose of education is, not simply adding to collected information, but benefitting humanity, which is why in the Quran, after relaying down the facts, Allah (SWT) has drawn a fine line between good and bad:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي السَّمَاءِ
تُؤْتِي أُكْلَهَا كُلَّ حِينٍ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهَا وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ. وَمَثَلُ
كَلِمَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ كَشَجَرَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ اجْتُثَّتْ مِنْ فَوْقِ الْأَرْضِ مَا لَهَا مِنْ قَرَارٍ.

“Have you not considered how Allah presents an example, [making] a good word like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed and its branches [high] in the sky? It produces its fruit all the time, by permission of its Lord. And Allah presents examples for the people that perhaps they will be reminded. And the example of a bad word is like a bad tree, uprooted from the surface of the earth, not having any stability.”²⁸

Prophetic way of Education

1400 years ago, the Prophet (SAW) introduced the concept of reading and writing in Arabia. At the time, the Arabs did not pay much importance to literary skills, rather relied more on their memories. In such circumstances, the Prophet (SAW) started his educational movement with the guidance of Allah (SWT). We will now discuss in detail the wisdom behind the methodology of education upon which the Prophet (SAW) acted as a teacher and left behind instructions to follow.

1. Dar al-Arqam in Makkah

While still in Makkah the Prophet (SAW) used to sit with the Sahaba in the house of al-Arqam and teach them Islam in detail.

2. Establishing of a learning center in Madina (Suffah)

Upon reaching Madinah, the Prophet's (SAW) first task was to build the Masjid-ul-Nabawi where he constructed a platform called Suffah, where students would gather together and learn. Dr. Hameedullah referred to this place as a 'residential university'.²⁹ In this learning place, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was the greatest teacher, where Hazrat Ubadah bin Samit (RA) was also a prominent teaching figure. Hazrat Ubadah bin Samit (RA) narrated: "I have taught the Quran and its writings to the people of Suffah."³⁰ Amongst the students of this university, Abu Hurairah (RA) was a prominent student.³¹ According to the narration of Ahmad bin Hanbal, the number of students studying at this institution reached up to seventy.³² The Prophet (SAW) introduced the following syllabus at Suffah:

i. Qira'at/ Tajweed (Rules for correct recitation of the Quran)

The students of the Suffah would be taught the Qirat and Tajweed of the Holy Quran by the Prophet (SAW) himself.

ii. Tahfeez ul Quran (Memorization of the Quran)

A special department was established specifically for the memorization of the Holy Quran

iii. Tazkiyah (Purification)

The Holy Prophet (SAW), along with the education of his students, also paid great attention to their ethical upbringing (tarbi'yah). When Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) prayed to Allah for the coming of a prophet, he used the word 'purification' along with other qualities.

رَبَّنَا وَأَبْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْنَهُمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ
إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

"Our Lord, and send among them a Messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise."³³

In this Dua, the word 'purify' signifies that purification was amongst the obligations of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). It tells us that without purification, the purpose of education too cannot be achieved.

3. Kitabat and Imla (writing and dictation)

Another department that the Prophet (SAW) established was that of dictation and writing. It was led by Hazrat Ubadah bin Samit (RA). He said: "I have taught the People of Suffah, the Quran."³⁴ The importance of writing and dictation was so great in the eyes of the Prophet (SAW) that he commanded the prisoners of the Battle of Badr from the Quraish to teach Muslim children how to read and write in exchange for their freedom. The Prophet (SAW) stressed upon the importance of the pen in a Hadith: "Capture knowledge with writing."³⁵

4. **Gentleness**

The wisdom given to the Holy Prophet (SAW) states that the teacher should be soft-spoken rather than harsh. Allah says in the Quran:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ

“So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you.”³⁶

So, the Prophet (SAW) treated his companions and students in a very gentle manner during their lessons. Hazrat Mu’awiyah bin Hakam (RA) narrated that once he was praying behind the Prophet (SAW) during which he behaved in a way unsuitable for prayer, the other companions were displeased with him but the Prophet (SAW), after the completion of his prayer, gently corrected him. He said that he had never seen a teacher like him before or after him, he did not admonish him or beat him, nor did he utter any harsh words, rather he said: “In prayer, the word of man is not appropriate. In it, only the remembrance of Allah and recitation of Quran is allowed.”³⁷

5. **Discouraging emotional approach towards students**

The importance of this point can be seen with an example from the life of the Prophet (SAW). A Bedouin passed urine in the Masjid ul Nabawi, but the Prophet (SAW) reacted in a very composed manner. Hazrat Anas bin Malik (RA) narrated: “We were present in the company of the Prophet (SAW) in the Masjid when a Bedouin came and he started passing urine. All the Sahabah stopped him but the Prophet (SAW) stopped them and said: “Do not stop him. Let him finish.” The Sahabah left him till he was done passing urine. The Prophet (SAW) then called him and said: “Passing urine and spreading impurity in mosques is not proper. These are places of worship, for the remembrance of Allah, prayers and the recitation of Quran.” Then the Prophet (SAW) commanded one of the Companions to pour a bowl of water over that area.”³⁸

6. **Lectures according to mental and intellectual capacities**

Another aspect of the Prophet’s (SAW) wisdom regarding education was considering the mental capabilities, ages, and differences between socio-economic backgrounds of the students.

7. **Education step by step**

As it is mentioned in the Qur’anic way of education, Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) also adopted the method of gradual learning. According to a Hadith, he instructed his companions who were assigned to teach in the tribal areas that they should not preach the teachings of Islam all at ones, rather they should begin with the basic beliefs and when their students have firm principles, they should ask them to establish the five daily prayers, and after that, teach them about fasting, charity and Hajj.³⁹

8. Brief but comprehensive

The Prophet's (SAW) method of teaching was designed in a way by which the audience would not feel overburdened and bored. Abdullah bin Masood (RA) relayed this quality of the Prophet (SAW) saying that he would deliver sermons with appropriate pauses.⁴⁰ We have also come to know through the Seerah about the Prophet's (SAW) longest sermon which was the Farewell sermon (Khutbah Hajjatul Wida) which was still a brief sermon. In Ahadith too, he generally did not explain several concepts at a time.

9. Appreciation towards asking questions

When the Prophet (SAW) would join anyone's company, he had the habit of joining in on their discussion rather than introducing a new topic all at once. Ibn e Abbas (RA) said: "Do not discontinue the prevailing topic for teaching, rather stay quiet until the people raise a question on their own".⁴¹

10. Condemnation of physical punishments

Naeem Siddiqui writes about the concept of punishment whilst teaching, in his article 'Rasulullah Bahesi at e Mualim' in these words: "The Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) methodology regarding punishment during teaching has two aspects: 1) it shouldn't be the kind of physical punishment that leaves a mark, 2) in severe cases, punishment may only be given after the age of ten".⁴²

11. Discouragement of arguing for the sake of argument

The Prophet (SAW) had discouraged the use of knowledge and intellectual abilities for the wrong purposes. He said: "Do not find contradictions between Ayaat of the holy Quran because usually, arguments cause disunity."

12. Not addressing the guilty party directly

The Prophet (SAW) generally did not tend to address the one at fault directly. Instead, he preferred correcting them in an indirect manner. Hazrat Anas (RA) reported that he said: "What reason is there that people raise their eyes towards the sky during prayer? They must refrain from this act, or else their vision will be taken away from them."⁴³

13. Educating through examples

Availing appropriate opportunities to make examples out of, was a way of the Holy Prophet (SAW). An event took place in the time of the Prophet (SAW) that proved this. A few prisoners were brought in front of the Prophet (SAW). Amongst them was a woman searching for her infant to nurse. In the search, she found a baby, emotional- she started nursing the child. The Prophet (SAW) noticed that his companions were very touched by the love of that woman. Taking advantage of that opportunity he addressed the Sahabah, and asked them: "If this woman were given the opportunity, would she be able to put her child in the Hell Fire?" The Sahabah replied: "By God,

she would not do it.” The Prophet (SAW) then said: “Allah is more Merciful to His people than this woman is to her child.”

14. Grasping the attention of the audience

The Prophet (SAW) would adopt several methods to attract the attention of his students. At times, he would begin by saying something very shocking. On others, he would ask abrupt questions, for example: “Do you know about such and such?” Likewise, sometimes he would describe such scenarios that the listeners would be forced to ponder over it. For example, before starting the Khutbah, at his farewell Hajj, the Prophet asked these questions: What is the name of this day? What is the name of this month. What is the name of this city? Then he (SAW) said:

إن دماءكم و أموالكم و أعراضكم حرام عليكم لحرمة يومكم هذا في شهركم هذا في بلدكم هذا

"your blood, your wealth and your honor are as sacred as this day, this month and this city is."⁴⁴

15. Use of repetition as a learning tool

The Prophet’s (SAW) way of preaching was to repeat whatever he said three times so that those who were listening could understand what he said and its meaning.

16. Emphasis on acquiring beneficial knowledge

The Prophet (SAW) stressed on learning that which was beneficial for both this world and the next. He discouraged the attainment of knowledge that led to nothing but the fulfillment of worldly desires. He often used to make this prayer: “O Allah! I ask you for beneficial knowledge”.⁴⁵

17. The Prophet (SAW) presented himself as a role model

The Holy Prophet (SAW) would always make sure that he himself was living according to the teachings that he preached before he taught them to others. The life of the Holy Prophet (SAW) was the practical explanation of the teachings of the Quran, that is why Allah (SWT) ordered Muslims to follow him. Allah says in the Quran:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

“Indeed in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example to follow for him who hopes in (meeting with) Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much.”⁴⁶

18. Adopting the language and dialect of the audience

Although all the Arab tribes conversed in Arabic, there were some differences in their individual dialects. The Prophet (SAW) would address specific tribes in their specific language dialects. Not only would they

understand his message better this way, they would also appreciate this gesture.

There is a Hadith in which the Prophet spoke like this:

ليس من امير امصيام في امسفر

In this dialect the Alif and Laam are converted into Alif and Meem.

19. Being considerate towards the comfort and ease of the students

Ibn e Masood (RA) narrated that the Prophet (SAW) would take special care of the comfort of the Companions whilst delivering lectures. Hazrat Anas (RA) reported that the Prophet (SAW) said: “Make ease for the people in matters of religion, not difficulty. Give glad tidings for good rewards and do not make matters of religion so difficult that they begin to hate the religion.”⁴⁷

20. Usage of new techniques during teaching

During the Battle of the Trench, the Prophet (SAW) consulted his companions for war strategies that could be adopted. Salman Al Farsi, a companion from Persia suggested that a trench be dug around the city of Madinah. The Prophet (SAW) greatly appreciated this idea which was previously unknown among the Arabs.

21. Humor

The Prophet (SAW) did not shy away from making small talk with his companions and would even enjoy poetry readings as long as they were free from any inappropriate content. Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated: “The companions said to the Prophet (SAW): “O Prophet of Allah! You joke with us”, he replied: “Yes, but I have never said a wrong thing”.⁴⁸

22. Forbade keeping knowledge to oneself

The Prophet (SAW) announced a very harsh punishment for someone who keeps knowledge to himself. He said: “There is no such person who has kept knowledge and hidden it, but will be brought forth on the Day of Judgment with a rein of fire in his mouth”.⁴⁹

23. Special arrangements for women’s education

The Prophet (SAW) paid significant importance to the education of women and designated one day per week for the women’s class. He said: “Do not forbid Allah’s servants (females) from going to the Masajid of Allah.”⁵⁰

In this manner, the Prophet (SAW) did his very best to ensure that the Muslim women were just as educated as the men.

Conclusion

I may conclude by one of the sayings of Imam Malik:

لن يصلح آخر هذه الأمة إلا بما صلح به أولها

"The last part of this Ummah will never be reformed with anything except with which its first part was reformed."

We as an Ummah have developed the habit of begging everything from the west. Since our own educational system was destroyed by the English rule in the Sub-Continent, we borrowed their educational system also. The English introduced their educational system in the Sub-Continent for a purpose. They needed people who could be proud in serving them. Indian Civil Service (ICS) was introduced. The educational institutions of the Muslims that were there for centuries, were closed down as they were stripped off their real estates. There were hundreds of acres of lands endowed for each Islamic university or college or even school. The British Raj took all these lands in the name of state and bestowed them to their faithful slaves who are called "jagirdars". Hence the Muslims students were left with no other choice except to get admission in the English schools or go to the Islamic schools that were unable to promise them any "good job" in the society.

Thanks to Allah that the English have left and we are blessed to have this country in the name of Islam, but unfortunately we are still following their footsteps. Our parable is like the "dog of the laundry man" who does not belong to the laundry man's house neither he belongs to his work place. We have already got too late to make the decision of "going back to our traditional system of education." But it is never too late to come back on track. Regarding innovation in teaching we need to follow the methodology set by Allah the Almighty in the Holy Qur'an and followed by our beloved Prophet in his Sunnad. There is no other way at all. We buy a car from the market and find an owner's manual with it. It tells you how you may operate its various systems to make good use of it and drive it properly. Allah has created us. He knows us more than we know our own selves. He gave us an owner's manual. It is a bit lengthy and at places difficult too. So He sent a great man to explain to us what this manual says. In the light of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah we may fix our educational system and make it innovative.

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