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Bridging the Gap Between theory and practice

In life of Muslims today

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Abstract

Today, the world is experiencing a state of perplexity about the situation of Muslims from all aspects. The social, educational, and economic policies of the Islamic world show a great deal of contradiction between the theoretical religious teachings and the ground realities; which often depict our worldly and materialistic approach to these teachings. Muslim communities are in desperate need of rectifying their lived reality, to eliminate this estrangement between the theory and the reality. This study recommends some measures towards bridging the gap between theory and practical application of the Islamic teachings in the lives of Muslims today. As life of Prophet Mohammad is exemplary, this study deduced recommendations from his life. It is required to activate the Role of Educational Institutions, Revise the School Curriculum, Launching of Prophetic Encyclopedia in Foreign Languages and creation of awareness through Media Institutions to narrow the gap.

Keywords: Bridging gap, Theory, Practice, Muslim Communities

الملخص:

واليوم، يشهد العالم حالة من الحيرة إزاء وضع المسلمين من جميع الجوانب. إن السياسات الاجتماعية

والتعليمية والاقتصادية في العالم الإسلامي تظهر قدرا كبيرا من التناقض بين التعاليم الدينية النظرية والواقع الأرضي؛ والتي غالبا ما تصور نهجنا الدنيوي والمادي لهذه التعاليم. إن المجتمعات المسلمة في حاجة ماسة إلى تصحيح واقعها المعيشي، للقضاء على هذا التباعد بين النظرية والواقع. توصي هذه الدراسة ببعض التدابير نحو سد الفجوة بين النظرية والتطبيق العملي للتعاليم الإسلامية في حياة المسلمين اليوم. وبما أن حياة النبي محمد مثالية، استنتجت هذه الدراسة توصيات من حياته. ومن المطلوب تفعيل دور المؤسسات التربوية وتنقيح المناهج المدرسية وإطلاق موسوعة النبوة في اللغات الأجنبية وإذكاء الوعي من خلال المؤسسات الإعلامية لتضيق الفجوة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سد الفجوة، نظرية، الممارسة، المجتمعات الإسلامية

Introduction

Even a superficial analysis reveals that the Islamic world is in turmoil. Virtually, most of the Muslim States are undergoing a phase of internal paroxysm and uncertainty due to political instability, economic under-development, scientific and technical backwardness, and cultural disruption. (Elizabeth & Annette, 2013)

The existing condition of the Muslim world needs to be examined in correct historical perspective. The Muslim culture, which had been the avant-garde of human intellectual and economic progress for several centuries after its birth, started indicating signs of slackening in the eighteenth century. (Farman Ali)

By the start of the 19th century, Muslim States were in no position to stand firm against the power and influence of the other nations which had been greatly toned up by new scientific breakthroughs, industrial and technological innovation, the development of their political, social, and cultural institutions, and the evolution of their organizational capabilities. (Mirza, 2006)

These circumstances lead to a state, where rich are getting richer whilst the poor can barely make both ends meet. More over, justice is denied to the poor and the feeble justice system reflects the oppressive and exploitive persona of our social and economic set up. These circumstances in most of the Muslim states are escalating public discontent and agitating internal

strife. The Muslim world needs to reconcile its pristine values emphasizing the principles of Tawheed, human brotherhood, social equality, and moderation in accordance with the demands of the modern world.

Key to Success

Muslims ruled the world by following the guidelines given by Prophet Mohammad. They shook the foundations of some of the greatest empires of that time by driving strength from truthfulness, brotherhood, and humanity. According to Allama Muhammad Iqbal, one of the greatest poets of Sub-continent; Muslims lost their power due to moral hollowness and materialistic attitude. He bewails over the loss of faith, which in fact maps out the direction of human soul.

Actions speak louder than words, it's a known fact that actions are the most imploring, influential, and efficient tools for channelizing information and molding others.

The prophetic biography is road map derived from events and narratives from his life that can guide us in our beliefs, loyalties, and attitudes towards life. Prophet (SAWS) demonstrated a live and true example of the values of Islam before delivering them verbally. For instance, his conduct was just and he exhibited tolerance even to his foes, before he advocated tolerance and justice. (Farhat, 2012)

1.1 Tolerance - Actions speak louder than words

Mohammed Ibn Ali Ibn Hussein Ibn Ali Ibn Abi Talib said that a Beduin came to the Messenger of Allah and said that his people had embraced Islam and thereafter became poorer. The Messenger of Allah said that he had nothing more to spend. A Jew behind the Prophet of Allah offered to give a loan to the Prophet who agreed and handed it to the Beduin to give to his people. Then the Messenger of Allah attended a funeral. After funeral, the Jew came and demanded Muhammad to repay the loan alleging that the Prophet's family was always late in

repayment. Omar Ibn Khattab said: "I would break your nose if not for the sanctity of the occasion." The Messenger of Allah said: "O Omar it's better for you to talk to him in a better way and ask me to repay him in a better way."

He ordered Omar to offer the Jew some supplies in repayment and to increase the repayment. Omar offered the repayment. The Jew was gratified and Omar gave him what the Prophet ordered. The Jew then told Omar that they had previously witnessed in Muhammad's character (SAWS) all that was accounted in Moses' book except tolerance. But through this incident, the Prophet's tolerance was attested clearly. He then said: "I testify there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger and be my witness to this and for presenting half of what I own to those who believe in Muhammad." Omar proposed the Jew to make the offer to the smaller group around the Prophet and not to the entire group of believers. Later, the Jew died, and the Prophet marched in his funeral carrying his coffin on his right shoulder while Ali carried it on his left. (Muhammad)

The noble Prophet (SAWS) taught his companions how setting a good example and having a calm and soft temperament is the effective means for holding dialogues with the other.

1.2 Honesty and Truthfulness

In Tafsir Al-Tabari, it was stated that the verses below from Surat Al-Nisaa were revealed to declare innocence of the Jew and disclose the guilt of his accuser, Tu'mah Ibn Ubairaq. Tu'mah was a man from the Ansar who stole a shield in trust with his uncle. Tu'mah took the shield and put it in the house of a Jew named Zaid Ibn Sameen. The family of Tu'mah went to the Prophet asking him to declare the innocence of their man, and the Prophet did. The Jew came to the Prophet complaining that he was framed for a crime he did not commit. Hereupon, the below verses from the Qur'an were revealed:

We have sent the Book down to you with the truth so that you may judge among mankind by means of what Allah has shown you. And do not be an advocate for the treacherous. Ask

Allah for forgiveness: He is most forgiving and merciful. And do not plead on behalf of those who are dishonest with themselves. Surely Allah does not love one who is treacherous and sinful. They feel ashamed before men, but do not feel ashamed before Allah, despite His being present with them when they plot at night, uttering things of which He does not approve; and indeed Allah is fully aware of what they do. You might argue on their behalf in the life of this world: but who will argue on their behalf with Allah on the Day of Resurrection and who will be their defender? Yet anyone who does evil or wrongs his own soul and then asks Allah for forgiveness will find Allah forgiving and merciful. He who commits sin does so against his own soul. Allah is all knowing and wise. And anyone who commits an offense or a sin, then charges an innocent person with it, shall certainly bear the guilt of a calumny and a manifest sin." (Amer)

The good example and great ethics of the Muslims were the reason for the spread of Islam throughout the East and West. The natives of these lands saw the values of truth, justice, equity, and good treatment of opponents personified in the Muslim visitors. The message of the noble Prophet (SAWS) caused a revolution against the corrupt society prevailing at the time of its revelation. The early believers were totally committed to its values, which led to an enormous change in their intentions, attitudes, behavior, and social activity. Through their changed attitudes, they convinced the world of the success of the message, and its effective transformational attributes. Thus the truth of the message was demonstrated through the practical behavior of those who followed it. Their tolerance, justice, honesty, fidelity, and transparency in their treatment of others of different beliefs were the most effective tools for the spread of Islam. (Arnold, 1896). In this context, Gustave Le Bon, the famous historian, says: Force was not the main factor for the spread of the Qur'an. The Arabs left the conquered free to practice their religions. If it happened that some Christians embraced Islam and took Arabic as their language, this was due to the justice and tolerance they saw from the victorious Arabs the like of which they had not seen from their previous rulers. (Gustave, 1912)

The positive and effective change in Muslims' attitudes, and the ability to communicate

with acts rather than words, is the one and only path towards rectifying the distorted image of Islam. Muslim communities should stay on this path until there is no inconsistency left between the lofty ideals of Islam and the reality in their societies. The return to the Islamic civilization identity and values will succeed provided that we keep the doors of communication open with each other and with Western and Eastern societies through social, cultural, and economic relations. Interaction is required to display the good example.

Early Muslims were able to enter the hearts of the people of the conquered lands before entering their lands, thanks to their moralities and applied ethics. They embodied the principles they learnt from their noble Prophet (SAWS) and followed his good example in behavior and communication. Emile der Menghem writes: "Islam, like a loud call, moved the hearts and it's awakened the East and the West from impiety and ignorance. It had such an impact on hearts that throughout ages, the human history does not remember such a spiritual revolution and a social movement." (Emile, 1872)

Sir Thomas Arnold says: Christians in the Jordan Valley welcomed Muslim armies under the leadership of Abu Obadiah. They preferred living with them to living under the rule of Byzantines even though they were of their own faith. (Arnold, 1896) They sent a letter to Abu Obadiah saying: "We prefer you to the Byzantines, though they are of our faith, because you keep better faith with us and are more merciful to us and refrain from doing injustice and your rule over us is better than theirs." (Ahmad) The effectiveness of this approach can be clearly seen in the wealth of historical evidence which describes the role of Muslim traders in the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia and Africa during their trading voyages. The people of these countries turned to Islam because they were impressed with the ethics of these traders.

In all cultures, individuals, especially children, never do what grownups tell them to do, but rather acts the way they see them acting; they follow their example. One of the most important methods of education is acting out the required behavior. The Prophetic biography laid the foundation for this concept. Communication scientists of modern ages confirm that non-verbal

communication which relies on acts and attitudes is a significant factor in delivering messages. The future of education is in practical, rather than verbal or written, messages.

Strategies of Implementation – Bridging the Gap

Since education is a powerful tool of social change and human progress, it is also a powerful tool to nurture values in an individual. Consequently all the educational institutes have greater obligation to impart learning and cultivation of values through education. (Berkowitz, Marwin & Oser & Fritz1985)

Activating the Role of Educational Institutions

The primary objective of education is to develop good moral values and skills to live a respectable life. It should fundamentally make a man God-fearing, perfect, and honest. The well-being of mankind lies neither in scientific or technological progressions nor in acquisition of material comforts. The primary goal of education is to enrich the persona. For infusing values many educationalists have recommended various methodologies for instance

- Provision of value based syllabus
- Designing special orientation program for teachers
- Value based foundation courses
- Publication of literature based on values
- Need to develop code of conduct for teachers and students
- Inculcation of philosophical view towards life among teachers and students

The role of schools in education may have been weakened. This is not attributed to one specific factor; but is related to several factors. However, a conscious systematic strategy for changing and improving the situation can certainly lead to positive results, if Allah wills so.

Psychologists believe that the primary educational stage is the most appropriate stage of social normalization. During this stage, the mental growth of the child improves, and he becomes

more interested in hunting for facts, and is more able to develop concepts and learn principles and values. He becomes intellectually curious and critical of himself and others; even those older than him. This capability should be effectively tapped and employed in instilling and ingraining the great Prophetic values in these young minds. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the current culture of indoctrinating students should definitely change. It should be converted into a culture which helps students achieve independent thought and self-actualization.

The focus of schools shouldn't be (for example) about memorizing information from the books of biography and Hadith - as currently happens - but should be on teaching students how to practically apply the Islamic value concepts and integrate them into their lived reality and daily lives. An example is the concept of accepting the other, and recognizing other people's differences. Such values can never be indoctrinated; they should rather be adopted by the teachers and students and practically applied by them. The Prophetic biography and ethics should be effectively used as examples in promoting these concepts.

Students may memorize dozens of texts, Hadith, and incidents from the biography; but yet, may not be seeing their connection to real life situations. This schizophrenia produces generations ignorant of the true meaning of their religion and its values. Educational institutions, their curriculum, teaching methodologies, and the atmosphere should all be designed to fight indoctrination and to adopt the concepts independent thought, expression of opinion, and development of intellectual abilities.

A young man came to the Messenger of Allah (SAWS) him and asked: 'O Messenger of Allah, permit me (with special license) to commit fornication (and adultery).' The people started to rebuke him harshly, but the Prophet sat close to him and asked: 'Would you like it for your mother?' He replied: 'No, by Allah, may Allah make me a sacrifice for you!' The Messenger of Allah (SAWS) said: 'And thus the people do not like it for their mothers.' He said: 'Would you like it for your daughter?' 'No': he replied. The Messenger of Allah (SAWS) said: 'And thus the people do not like it for their daughters.' He said: 'Would you like it for your paternal aunt?' 'No': he

replied. The Messenger of Allah (SAWS) said: 'And thus the people do not like it for their paternal aunts.' He said: 'Would you like it for your maternal aunt?' 'No': he replied. The Messenger of Allah (SAWS) said: 'And thus the people do not like it for their maternal aunts.' Then the Prophet put his hand on that man and said: O Allah forgives his sin and purifies his heart and makes him chaste (fortify his abstinence from sexual sins)". Thereafter, the young man was never seduced by anything. (Ahmad)

In this incident, the noble Prophet (SAWS) did not use direct words of admonition or rebuke, nor did he sermonize and outline the punishment for fornication. Rather, he showed impact of his deliberate action and guided him. This educational approach should be studied conscientiously and practiced in real life situations. Memorization of the above Hadith (only) will not have the same enlightening effect on the behavior of his personality.

In summary, the teacher or educator should represent a good example for students. His/her responsibility as a teacher will not be fulfilled by dictating information, or indoctrinating thoughts, concepts, and beliefs.

2.2 Revising School Curriculum

School curriculum can definitely play a crucial role if it is based on values derived from the Quranic and Prophetic texts. Thus, the required curriculum should articulate Islamic values such as moderation, equability, acceptance of diverse opinions, forbearance, truthfulness, excellence, apprehension for the environment, and other moral values adopted by the noble Prophet (SAWS).

The school curriculum, with all its materials, examples, exercises, and resources can be the cornerstone for promoting Islamic values and guiding towards responsible behavior. Practical application can be learnt by presenting problems faced by the world today – in a manner apposite for each age group - and guiding students to reach a solution based on the teachings of the noble Prophet (SAWS). The curriculum, if related to the Prophetic biography and Hadith,

should be presented in a new way. The learner should be given the freedom to understand, judge, and adopt. Hence, the intellectual process of determining right and wrong can be rationalized and discussed freely and openly.

It goes without saying that the current teaching methods and techniques desperately need to improve. We should stop focusing on traditional teaching methods which have proven to be ineffective, especially in the midst of the scientific revolution witnessed by the world today. The methods of memorization and indoctrination should definitely be abandoned; and new methods which rely on problem-solving techniques should emerge. Students should be trained in thought processes, choice between alternatives, and appropriate methods of expression. (McCallum, 1979)

School activities can play a role in teaching students about the importance of the Prophetic biography and its solutions for our day to day problems. Therefore, school activities should be developed to allow for scientific analysis, collaboration, and effective interaction with others. The concepts of teamwork, coexistence, freedom of opinion, respect for others' opinions, and positive criticism can be practiced and acquired. All such values were practically established through the Prophetic Sunnah through actions and deeds. It was reported (as an example) that the noble Prophet (SAWS) used to work alongside his companions on different tasks to emphasize the importance of collaborative work. (Ali & Kecia, 2014) We also have to focus on the method for introducing the new curriculum. In addition, discussion and allowing the learner the freedom of expression is one of the best tools for delivering information. In this context, Ibn Khaldun says: "In the learning process, overworking the body can inflict harm on the learner, especially young children. He, who was raised on violence and hostility, whether a student, or slave, would be driven towards idleness, deceit, and malice out of fear from the oppression." (Ahmad, 1968)

Thus, educational institutions can play a crucial role in instilling the Prophetic Sunnah, its moralities, and virtues in the Muslim mindset. Islamic values, if properly understood and applied, provide a comprehensive base for an educational system which can be applied in any

environment and at any time.

2.3 Launching the Prophetic Encyclopedia in Foreign Languages

This type of project will attract Western thinkers and scientists as well as many erudite and experienced researchers in various fields. It will also appeal to those interested in studying the application of Prophetic biography in our contemporary world. In her book (Muhammad: a Prophet for Our Time), Karen Armstrong says: "As a paradigmatic personality, Muhammad has important lessons, not only for Muslims, but also for Western people....Muhammad literally sweated with the effort to bring peace to war-torn Arabia, and we need people who are prepared to do this today'. (Karen, 2006)

There are many reputable, unbiased Western writers from whom we can benefit in this effort. We need to utilize the intellectual vision of many impartial Western politicians, leaders, and media reporters of contemporary history; those who refuse to accept the false allegations against Islam and Muslims. Thus, every unbiased voice and every fair view have a role in this project. The main goal of this Prophetic Encyclopedia is to confront the spurious media, and present, through facts and objective analysis, the true image of the noble Prophet (SAWS) and the value of his accomplishments to the world.

At various points, Prince Charles has asserted that the teachings of Islam are capable of spreading peace and brotherhood among people. (Charles, 2007) He has also confirmed that the clash of civilizations could be easily resolved if the teachings of the Qur'an were followed.

"The world problems could be resolved by following Islamic teachings, as Islam is a religion of peace and brotherhood." With regard to the accomplishments of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) for humanity, Alphonse De Lamartine says: "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws, and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often

crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and souls. On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blended together peoples of every tongue and of every race." (Alphonse, 1854)

Hence, launching the project of the Prophetic Encyclopedia, and inviting many of the fair Western writers to participate, is an absolute necessity and a global demand.

2.4 Media Institutions

Undoubtedly, the role of media in the social education and thought formation for individuals and societies is truly remarkable. Media offers people a wide range of information, analysis, facts, news, images, and advertisements about certain topics. Thus, it contributes to the formation of trends and values which subsequently leads to the formation of a public opinion about these topics. (Teresa, 2000). Hence, the press, radio, television, satellite channels, and the internet can easily influence people's attitudes and ways of thinking.

Those in power are aware of the importance of the media and try to make it subservient to their goals. They use it to present their case in various ways through its different channels. The importance of public opinion and its role in effecting change is well-known. It is a focal point of interest for many psychologists, sociologists, politicians, and reporters. Swaying public opinion is the key to the success of any idea advocated by an entity or institution. It is an indicator of the prevalence of certain views and perceptions, right or wrong, which form the attitudes of individuals and societies, and predict their responses to different issues and incidents.

All the research and studies which discuss the impact of the audio, visual, and print media on the socialization process show the effectiveness of their role in shaping and changing views, trends, and attitudes of individuals. Thus, any society aiming for progress and development can no longer ignore the role of mass media, especially in our Information Age. It is a highly effective

tool in directing social and cultural attitudes. If the media is used properly, it can definitely contribute in presenting the true image of the noble Prophet (SAWS) and his great civilization's accomplishments in the world of today. Unfortunately, thus far, the role played by Western media has been presenting a completely false image of the Prophet (SAWS), his ethics and attitudes, in an unprecedentedly insulting stereotyped frame. Robin Wright –the diplomatic correspondent for the Washington Post- asserts this painful fact. In many of her studies, she emphasizes that Islam is one of the most tolerant religions, despite the distorted image of the noble Prophet (SAWS) and his teachings which has been widely spread by the mass media. (Robin, 1996)

However the media is a double-edged sword and the different audio-visual forms of Islamic media can, by addressing people through an objective and scientific approach in their own language, laid the foundation for a public culture which respects the sanctities of others and recognizes their contributions. This will help present the true image of the noble Prophet (SAWS). For this effort to succeed the communications should be free from prejudice, hostility, and preconceptions, and should maintain an objective scientific tone to present facts that no open mind can deny.

Conclusion

To start with, the Muslim world is yet to emancipate itself from the stranglehold of obsolete tenets, which have nothing to do with the real pedagogies and the true spirit of Islam. Muslim scholars and intellectuals must explicate the spirit of free enquiry in retrieving the answers to challenges of modernism while staying faithful to Islam's perpetual principles enounced in the Holy Quran. Religious extremism and sectarianism which are trashing the Islamic world must be desolated. This is improbable unless the Islamic regimes give the pride of place to education and promote freedom of expression and moderation in their curricula, which isn't the case at present.

Secondly, Islamic states require modernizing the overall political structure, based on the principle of consultation in accordance with the injunctions of the Holy Quran. This rationale requires democratic and participatory political system in the contemporary world. Military dictatorships, dynastic rule, and monarchies have no place in an Islamic political system. Unfortunately, numerous Muslim states are under the yoke of non-participatory political system—a prime cause for the agitation and political imbalance in the Islamic world particularly in the Middle East. Thirdly, the social and economic systems in most of the Islamic states are tyrannous and exploitive. In contrast with the Islamic principles of social equality and fraternity, they disunite the society into classes barring vertical mobility and widening economical inequalities. There is an urgent need to implement some strategies in life of Muslims today to overcome this challenge such as; activating the Role of Educational Institutions School curriculum, launching the Prophetic Encyclopedia in Foreign Languages and neutralizing Media institutions. Additionally, continuing education should include dialogue on the role of practice and good example on building bridges, not only among Muslims and other communities but within Muslims themselves as well. Greater attention should be paid to what we actually do.

Islam is the only religion which brings harmony, countless blessings, and sorority in the human society. Muslims have a great center i.e. Mecca which keeps all the Muslims united through out the world. They gather there with one aim, praise to Allah in one language (Arabic) and in one uniform (Ah'ram). About faith and believers Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other."

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