

Sources and Values of Prophet Muhammad's (SAAS) Educational System: Some Preliminary Views*

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Introduction

Education is generally understood as a process of human and social development. It is a vital phenomenon of society. Shaping of human personalities, cultures or civilizations owes much to education. However, education is not without content-sources, technically called epistemologies nor is it devoid of its values and aims. In the history of mankind, there have been upheavals in educational philosophies comprising in either spiritualism, idealism or that of naturalism or materialism. It has created uncertainty and discontent at the general level though seeming apparently as progress and development. Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), who has brought Allah's message to mankind as His Last Prophet, propounds a distinctive educational philosophy and system. It is characteristic of human emancipation and Justice (*adl*) with man's self, innate potentialities and practical activities and leads to the proper goals on genuine values of life. This is an all-embracing system of education emancipating man within and without to realise his full self spiritually as well as socially or culturally. In the present essay an attempt is made to approach the Prophet's (SAAS) system of education in the context of conventional educational philosophies. Its values are also briefly underscored to pave the way for reconstructing the holistic and viable system of education as panacea to the present educational crisis.

1. Education and Its Conventional Philosophies

Education as already mentioned forms a substantial means of development in human society. Man is a wonderful creation and so is the cosmos. Forming a view about his own self, (*nafs*) the other human beings and the world as a whole is attainable through education. A set of ideas, doctrines or maxims about life is the outcome of educational discourses and academic organisations. The former is *sine quo non* for human life as it sets direction, change or progression in it. Education is so to say individuality and social identity of man.¹

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There has been a good deal of developing ideas and philosophies about education in human history. In the western context a number of educational philosophies are propounded. Some of them have been broadly classified as Idealism, Realism and Pragmatism while others are ascribed more to individual thinkers. Idealism chiefly deals with supremacy of ideas which are of spiritual and imaginative type and material objects are least recognised in it. Plato is earlier propounder of this philosophy who holds that Truth, Beauty and Goodness is aim of education. After him this is pursued by other European thinkers like Descartes (1596-1650), Spinoza (1632-1677), Kant (1724-1804), Hegel (1770-1831) and Schopenhauer (1788-1860). In their own way they emphasised on intellectual and ethical considerations in knowledge. In this way, Idealism comprehends intellectual, aesthetic and moral activities in it.²

Realism is another school of educational philosophy. It is contrary to the plea of idealists and holds that ultimate truth lies in the external world perceived through human senses. Reality is the day to day reality of matter rather than spiritual or intellectual. This philosophy of Realism is the product of Renaissance and Reformation movements in Europe. It is a protest against subjective idealism. Lord Montaigne, Francis Bacon and Bertrand Russell are regarded as the propounders of Realism philosophy. Russell says 'I contend that ultimate constituent of matter are not atoms but sensation. I believe that stuff of our mental life consists wholly of sensations of images.'

Matter and senses are here truth and knowledge is attained through them.³ Philosophy of Pragmatism, on the other hand, emphasises on practicability and utility of things. Pragmatists believe that first the activity is done then on the basis of its results, principles of ideas are derived. That is why it is also called experimentalism and consequentialism. Pragmatism is associated with human welfare. An activity is good if its result is good and if not then it needs to be changed. Here truth is not absolute and permanent but changing from time to time, place to place and situation to situation. C.B. Pearce, William James, Schiller and John Dewey are regarded its main propounders.⁴

These philosophies are influential in shaping the modern educational systems. Education in some religious quarters has become merely a spiritual or other worldly phenomenon and thus exclusively idealistic. It is, however, criticised on its subjectivism and immobility traits. Realism is a protest to it and emphasises on objective truth of things, perceivable through one's sense. Sensory facts are knowledge of truth. Little similar to it is Pragmatist philosophy that supports the derivation of truth on the basis of utility and practicability of things in day to day experience. All these philosophies are not

grounded on the real nature of man, his position in society thus they become subject to many limitations. This limits man either to an entity of imaginative idealism or sensory perception or utilitarian activism. Hence these philosophies are somewhat exclusivist and reductionist not apprehending man in his totality and all-embracing way. The Prophet's system of education is grounded on genuine sources of knowledge and is characteristic of universal and all-embracing traits of humanity.

2. Sources of the Prophet's Muhammad's Educational System

Muhammad (SAAS) is the last and the universal Prophet of Islam. He conveyed the message of Allah in best possible way to mankind. He is described by Allah as *Uswat-al-Hasanah* (model character) for mankind.⁵ His is also the role of educator and moral reformer (*muzaki*).⁶ Under him as well as his companions particularly Righteous Caliphs (*Khulafah al-Rashidun*) educating about the knowledge of life and society became a good concern. It developed its own distinctive system that became instrumental in imparting the knowledge of Islam in formal (through *mosques*, *maktabs* and *majalis* and informal (interaction and occasional meetings) ways.⁷ This education is of unique character as it is sustained by both the Divine, rational and experimental sources of knowledge and illuminate's life in all-embracing way. Broadly these sources can be classified as *Naqli* sources (transmitted sources) and '*Aqli* sources (rational sources).

(a) Naqli (transmitted) sources:

The '*naqli* source is the fundamental sources of education of Prophetic system. It comprises revelation (*wahi*) in the recited (*mutlu*) and unrecited (*ghayr mutlu*) forms.⁸ The former is the Qur'an (Allah's Book) and the latter are Hadith of the Prophet (SAAS). The Qur'an is the legitimate proof of valid knowledge or reality itself for its internal and external evidences (like its miraculousness and preserved text) and also serves as proof of the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAAS).

The Qur'an mentions:

Now there has come to you from God a light and a clear divine writ.⁹

At other place it is instructed:

What the Messenger has given to you then take it, and what he prohibits then abstain from it.¹⁰

The Prophet illustrates it further as:

I have left two things among you, till you keep strong hold of them you won't be astrayed. These are the Book of Allah (the Qur'an) and the Sunnah of the Prophet.¹¹

The Qur'an in its own terms is described as *hidaya* (guidance),¹² *furqan* (criteria)¹³ *dhikr*, (remembrance)¹⁴ *shifa* (healing)¹⁵ and addresses man in his practical affairs both in general and specific ways. Man is the subject of the Qur'an and Hadith is complementary to its knowledge. It provides details and explanations to the contents of the Book of Allah. Both these sources provide knowledge about man and other creations of the universe, seen and unseen, basic truths/principles of it particularly relating to unseen are described as religious beliefs (*aqā'id*) and the knowledge about the ways of worship as (*ibadat*), meant to develop close relationship with God to attain purity of the self and pleasure (*rada*) of Allah. Laws of Islam are given to socialise man on sound ethical grounds and save him from the hazards of intellectual and moral perversion.

The Qur'an mentions the traits of the believers as:

The Apostle and the believers with him, believe in what has been bestowed upon him from on high by his sustainer; they all believe in God, and His angels, His revelations, and His apostle, making no distinctions between any of his apostles, and they say 'we have heard and we pay heed, Grant us thy forgiveness, O our sustainer, for will thee is all your end.'¹⁶

On the social ethics it is explained to man:

True piety does not consist in turning your faces towards the east and the west but truly pious is he who believes in God and the last day, and the angels, and revelation, and the prophets, and spends his substance however much he himself may cherish it upon his near of kin and the orphans, and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for the freeing of human beings from bondage and is constant in prayer and renders the purifying dues, and they who keep their promises whenever they promise and are patient in misfortune and hardship and in hardship and in time of peril it is they that have proved themselves true and it is they who are conscious God.¹⁷

So this *naqli* or Revealed source, the Qur'an and Sunnah, serves as the fundamental source of the Prophetic or what can be called Islamic education.

Man is granted knowledge and his social practices are purified (*tazkiyah*) in a proper way. This is the knowledge of life and wisdom (*hikmah*) exposing the truths of his self (*nafs*) and the universe (*afaq*). As Allama Iqbal has aptly said that 'the main purpose of Qur'an is to awaken in man the higher consciousness of his relation with God and universe'.¹⁸ Consciousness about God can be even ordinarily possible as man is innately tended towards it or at his general rational level he may comprehend the divine power to some extent. Conscious awakening, however, to its higher level where man understands his actual position, role and responsibility vis-a-vis the society is distinctively genuine and clear. It is the knowledge of certainty and practicality and develops man's individuality to its spiritual and social or civilizational heights.

(b) 'Aqli (Rational) Sources:

No doubt, the Prophetic educational system is characteristic of Revealed or transmitted knowledge but it is never devoid or ambivalent to some other reasonable sources of knowledge. These other sources are termed as rational and experimental/empirical sources. In these sources reason/intellect and observation/empiricism plays a special role. Reason and observation are important faculties of an individual being. The Qur'an recognises them in terms of *sama'*, *basar* and *fuad*¹⁹ and even their functional aspects are also underscored like a *ta'qul*, *tafakur* and *tadabur*. These have subsidiary role in Islamic education and can hardly be used independently or liberally. To use them independently or in isolation from the primary knowledge source – Revelation - will prove harmful to our life because such knowledge has its own limitations and weaknesses. Rational knowledge can be useful when directed and grounded in Revealed knowledge. In the Prophetic system of education, it is recognised broadly within two methods:

I) Intellectual Method

It is of course of rational nature where intellect/reason is exercised to understand the facts about things. By reflecting and pondering over things in a thorough way leads to answer or solutions to problems. Induction and deduction method plays a great role in it. One's mind gets involved in it and uses as his logic to gather knowledge of facts. Through deduction and induction knowledge is emanated from one factor/norm and extended to other. Such rational or intellectual exercises were not despised by the Prophet (SAAS) yet encouraged in terms of forming ones opinion (*ray*) that helps him to solve his day to day problems of life. However such opinions and thought should not be harmful to public interests (*maslah al-'amah*). Most of the

corpus of fiqh knowledge got developed in Islamic history through this wide method. It made expansion of knowledge religiously rather than narrows it down and thus narrowing life itself.

II) Experimental Method

It is also of rational nature of other type. Here things are observed through man's senses and knowledge about their nature is acquired accordingly. It is an observational or experimental method. In modern terms it is called positivist or scientific method. In the Prophetic system it has its place. On many occasions the Prophet gave credence to this source of knowledge like engaging a non-Muslim path knower at the time of his secret migration to Madina, using experimental knowledge for military tactics and pollination experiment by the farmers.²⁰ As the hadith reported by Musa bin Talha (RA) ends with the words "You know better about your mundane affairs"²¹ typifies the legitimacy of such method of knowledge.

3. Conformity to Shari'ah Interests

Both these methods of rational sources are found in the Islamic system of education. Their primary nature is that they are subordinate to the Revealed source. In the western epistemology they operate in two ways. One is materialist way to satisfy carnal and material interests to its optimum. Other is neutral to discover laws of nature on actual position of the things and make a proper use of them. Almost in both the ways ethical norms of true humanity are ignored and so they are subject to inconsistencies and discontent. As a matter of fact till these methods do not conform to Divine/universal truths of life in terms of its dignity, sacredness, total harmony (*tawazun*), social justice and above all, universal brotherhood which in theological terms is called Shari'ah interests, rational sources /methods of knowledge are of very little use. That is why the Prophet (SAAS) builds the educational system on both the Revealed knowledge and the rational knowledge paradigms and this integration characterises its extensive and all-embracing nature. S. M. Naquib al-Attas illustrates this fact of Islamic knowledge as following:

The Islamic world-view is not to be constructed as dualism, for although two elements are involved, yet the one is dependent and subsistent while the other is dependent upon it, the one is absolute and the other relative; the one is real and the other a manifestation of that reality. So there is only one Reality and Truth, and all Islamic values pertain ultimately to it alone, so that to the Muslims individually and collectively, all endeavour towards change and development and progress and perfection is

invariably determined by the world view that projects the vision of the one Reality and confirms the affirmation of same Truth. In affirmation of Being, the Holy Qur'an, the source of Islam and projector of Islamic world-view and the vision of one Reality and Truth, is the expression of the finality and perfection of 'being,' and he who conveyed the Holy Qur'an to mankind himself represented the finality and perfection of 'being,' in man, may God bless and give him peace.²²

4. Values of the System

Infact, the Prophet's system of education is normative and value oriented. It has both transcendental (spiritual) and social values. *Tawhid* – unity of God is the supreme norm of the system. Islamic education, in fact, derives its core from *Tawhid*-uniqueness of God's essence and attributes. Knowledge too is united to Him. Creation (*khalq*) and social order (*amr*) belong to God.²³ *Tawhid* is found ontologically and ethically in the human world. Knowledge and education is designed on this principle of *Tawhid* in Islam. Inclusion of *Tawhid* consciousness and adherence to its demands is emphasised upon in this system. The importance of *Tawhid* doctrine provides the healthy and ever growing living to man in this world. It is mentioned comprehensively in the following verse of the Qur'an:

Art thou nor aware how God sets forth the parable of good word? [It is] like a good tree, firmly rooted, [reaching out] with its branches towards the sky, yields its fruit at all times by its sustainers leave. And [thus it is that] God propounds parables unto men, so that they might think themselves [of the truth].²⁴

The good word is morally good denoting faith in Allah that instructs man about his life on sound and just basis progressing to heights of spiritual and social importance. The Prophet (SAAS) is a living proof of this good word – Faith oriented life to whole mankind:

Verily, in the apostle of God you have a good example for everyone who looks forward (with hope and awe) to God and the last day, and remembers God unceasingly.²⁵

Secondly Islamic system holds the value of unity of mankind. Human beings form one unity (*ummah*) and enjoy dignity and equality. The Creator of them all is one whose chosen path is to be adhered strictly and with unity. Of course, Allah's path is the path of truth, love, kindness and co-operation which render mankind a unity-(*wahadah*) and procts it to indulge in harmful

divisions and discriminations at humanity level. In the Qur'an this principle is specifically mentioned:

O mankind! Be conscious of your sustainer who created you out of one living entity, and out of its mate, and out of the two spread multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God, in whose name you demand (your rights) from one another, and of these ties of kinship.²⁶

About holding Allah's path firmly to forge unity is guided in the following verse of the Qur'an:

Oh you who have attained faith! Be conscious of God with all the consciousness that is due to Him, and do not allow death to overtake you ere you have surrendered your selves unto Him. And hold fast, all together unto the bond with God, and don't draw apart from one another.²⁷

Sincerity and honesty also find important place in the value system of Islamic education. No true individuality or personality will be built without the trait of sincerity and honesty in it. Personality grows on the purity of one's heart rather than on its corruption or perversion. Sincerity is cardinal to the purity of one's heart and it develops the ethical of Divine consciousness in his deeds and practices. Islamic education is really the education of purity of heart and mind. It won't recognise imparting knowledge about natural or social phenomena without spiritual or moral touch. This protects education from various corruptions whatsoever its domain will be - social, economic, political and religious. Atheism and materialism which deprive man of true contentment are actually the products of knowledge/ education that does not focus on sincerity and honesty principles but inculcate arrogance and rivalry elements in one's mind. In one of his popular *hadith*, the Prophet (SAAS) explains the vitality of sincerity and purity of heart in performing deeds as following:

Umar ibn al-Khatab (RA) reports that he heard from Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), all the deeds depend on intentions and every person will get the reward according to his intentions. So whoever emigrates merely for Allah and his prophet (SAAS) his migration is (ofcourse) for Allah and his prophet and one who emigrates for some mundane cause or to marry any women and this emigration will be for what he emigrated for.²⁸

Justice ('*adl*') also serves as an essential value of the Prophet's education. It is the principle that sets a balance and harmony in man within and without. Justice is to be done with one's own self and with other members of society. It is a revolutionary norm that emancipates man in a good deal by enjoying his due civil rights like that of faith, dignity, property, progeny and expression and these are extended to other fellow citizens of society. This characteristic of justice and freedom which Islamic cherishes without any discrimination in these norms inculcates its knowledge among the learners extensively. Most of the *fiqh* education comprises such themes in it. Education of Islamic law (*fiqh*) is so to say education of justice that is core of social living and renders it a balanced and peaceful one. In *Surah al-Hadid* the establishment of the just and balanced system of life is stated as following:

Indeed, [even a foretime] did we set forth our apostles with all evidence of (this) truth and through them we bestowed revelation from on high and [this gave you] a balance [where with to weigh right and wrong] so men might behave with equity.²⁹

One more norm of this educational system is its promulgating universal peace and prosperity. Islam never allows to restrict good and welfare to few individuals but extends it to mankind as a whole. The Prophet (SAAS) himself is proclaimed as mercy to whole mankind, endowed with guidance (*hidayah*) for people as a whole, along with establishing peace and prosperity universally. The norm is an antithesis to parochialism and discriminations found among the most quarters of current human societies. Islamic education abhors this discriminative character of knowledge ethic promotes peace and welfare globally. This is however, not the globalisation of modern sense of the term but globalisation of true spiritual and ethical values. By having norms of peace and welfare in knowledge corpus that moulds life towards balanced spiritual and practical transformation.

Conclusion

From the above analysis it brings out that education is a process of human development in the context of the modern conventional philosophies and the Prophetic educational system. The former is characteristic of Idealism, Realism or Pragmatism. These philosophies are subject to exclusive nature of speculative ideas, objective facts or practical utility of a thing respectively. None of them takes note of the real nature of man who has faculty of heart and soul that needs to be treated vis-a-vis the day to day social realities. So in the conventional philosophies real man, of sacred and supreme dignity gets lost in

materialism and secularisation. Contrary to it, is the Prophetic system of education. It is primarily sustained by Divine or Revealed knowledge which explains actual nature of man (his *fitrah*) and guides him about the basic truth of his life vis-a-vis his relation and role in the world. The Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAAS) are the only authentic existing sources of his Revealed knowledge which is also described as *Naqli* (transmitted) sources. Islamic education is primarily grounded on this transmitted scriptural source of knowledge yet recognises at the same time the other rational/ sources within the proper limits. Intellectual and empirical sciences are not isolated from Islamic system but find a due place and role in it. Not only Islamic intellectual heritage is its glory but much of the Western scientific development owes much to Islamic education. Islamic education, unlike the conventional one, is value-oriented on spiritual and ethical principles. It is *Tawhidic*, egalitarian, emphasising on sincerity and honesty, justice and universal peace and welfare. This inculcates *Tawhid* and ethic rooted ideological system in a learner and forms him practically an emancipated and responsible citizen of society. The present crisis in the conventional modern education will be checked only when it is reformed on true human ethical values. Similarly, the existing Muslim pattern of education needs a through revision to make it more and more productive to face the grave challenges of the contemporary times.

References and Notes

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- ¹² Al-Qur'an, *al-Baqarah*, 3.
- ¹³ Ibid. 2:53; 8:29; 2:185.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. 21:50; 38:18; 38:1; 65:10-11.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. 17:82; 41:44.
- ¹⁶ Ibid. 2:285.
- ¹⁷ Ibid. 2:177.
- ¹⁸ Allama Iqbal has dealt this theme specially in both his poetic and prose works. The first chapter of his famous work, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* is, however, of pioneering nature.
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