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1. Atta ur Rahman

a.rehman@cch.edu.pk

Ph.D. Scholar,

Department of Islamic Studies,

Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KPK.

2. Dr. Muhammad Zakariya

zaka336@gmail.com

Lecturer,

Department of Islamic Studies,

Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KPK.

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Evolution of Teaching as a Profession in Islam

1. Atta ur Rahman

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KPK.
a.rehman@cch.edu.pk

2. Dr. Muhammad Zakariya

Lecturer, Department of Islamic Studies, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, KPK.
zaka336@gmail.com

Abstract:

The main aim of this research manuscript is to explore the significance of teaching as a profession in the field of education leading to progress in all fields of life. The cream of a nation must enthusiastically adopt this profession if that nation aspires to develop by leaps and bounds. This profession can be adopted by the cream if it is made lucrative by awarding great respect to it, outstanding monetary / French benefits and state patronage as it was done by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his successors particularly the Rightly Guided caliphs in the early stage of the Muslim state. Therefore, Muslims surpassed other nations, progressed tremendously and Islam reached far flung areas of the world. So, the way to social, economic and political advancement in all walks of life is paved by the investment and development in education particularly in teachers by motivating the cream of a nation to prefer the sacred profession of teaching.

Keywords: Teaching, Profession, Islam, Development, Social.

Introduction

The *Qur'ān* and Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)'s *aḥādīth* clearly emphasize the importance of education and teaching. All Prophets were, undoubtedly, great educators and mentors. The supplication of *Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm* and *Ḥaḍrat Ismā'īl* for the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as a teacher also speaks volumes about the importance of sending him as a teacher. The Prophet (ﷺ) declares himself as a teacher as he had realized that the way to revolutionize his people is only through education. So, in *Makkah*, he established an institution called *Dār-e-Arqam* in the house of *Ḥaḍrat Arqam* (RA) where he would teach and groom his companions like *Ḥaḍrat Abū Bakr*, *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar*, *Ḥaḍrat 'Alī* and *Ḥaḍrat 'Uthmān* (RA) for future.

After the second pledge of *'Uqbah*, he sent *Ḥaḍrat Mus'ab Bin 'Umair* (RA) as a teacher to *Madīnah* where he taught the *Qur'ān* and teachings of Islam to the people of *Madīnah*. After the Prophet's migration to *Madīnah*, he constructed a mosque where he would also teach his companions particularly at the place of *Ṣuffah* and a revolution was brought about from here as graduates like *Ḥaḍrat Abū Hurairah* (RA) passed out. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) also selected some companions as teacher assistants like *Ḥaḍrat 'Ubādah Bin Ṣāmit* (RA) for male companions while *Ḥaḍrat 'Āisha* (RA) for female companions.

During the Battle of *Badr*, seventy prisoners of war came into the custody of Muslims. They had to pay the ransom of 4000 dirhams each if they were financially sound but those prisoners of war who could teach Muslim children how to read and write were

exempted from its payment. It is noteworthy that Muslims were in dire need of financial assistance at that time but Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) preferred education to monetary benefit. It displays the academic vision of the Prophet (ﷺ).

Later on, at intervals, he would send his prominent companions to other tribes of Arab to teach and groom. Even sometimes, his companions were martyred by other tribes. Despite, this great cause of sending companions as teachers never stopped and a revolution was caused in the peninsula of Arabia within 23 years. Consequently, global leadership was prepared for the future generation.

The Rightly Guided Caliphs also tried their level best to bring about a revolution in the system of education. So, they highly encouraged other companions to choose this sacred profession of teaching and contribute to the transformation of the Muslim society. *Ḥaḍrat Abū Bakr (RA)* could not focus more in doing so as he was much occupied with the internal and external problems faced by the Muslim state at that time. But his contribution to the compilation of the *Qur'ān* is unforgettable in the history of Islam. The syndicate of fifty people to compile the *Qur'ān* also encouraged the Prophet's companions to promote teaching as a profession in an outstanding way.

Then *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar (RA)* took over as the second caliph of Islam and concentrated on education as he got more sufficient time to contribute to the promotion of teaching as a profession. He developed the system introduced by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). He appointed various major companions of the Prophet as teachers like *Ḥaḍrat Zaid Bin Thābit*, *Ḥaḍrat 'Abdullāh Bin 'Umar*, *Ḥaḍrat Abū Mūsā Ash'arī*, *Ḥaḍrat 'Abdullāh Bin Mas'ūd*, *Ḥaḍrat Mu'ādh Bin Jabal*, *Ḥaḍrat Abū Dardā*, *Ḥaḍrat 'Ubādah Bin Ṣāmit (RA)* and sent them to various places so that they might render their valuable services to the great cause of education.

Furthermore, he brought the early education under the state patronage, fixed 15 dirhams as the salary for a teacher, appointed special teachers to educate the illiterate people in villages and towns of Arabia and appoint new teachers in the conquered areas. He awarded great respect to these teachers and encouraged others to be teachers so that a society based on knowledge might be prepared.

Then *Ḥaḍrat 'Uthmān (RA)* became the third caliph of Islam, carried on the legacy of *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar (RA)* and contributed to the promotion of this sacred profession in the society. He fixed the salaries even for the callers of *Adhān* and reciters of the *Qur'ān* so that Muslims could correctly recite the *Qur'ān*.

Then *Ḥaḍrat 'Alī* carried on this legacy and tried to focus but the internal skirmishes/infighting were common. Later, during the rule of *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar Bin 'Abdul 'Azīz*, he promoted this profession as he appointed even visiting teachers to ensure the education of the illiterate people in the society. He also focused on the welfare of teachers. He once sent a letter to the governors to fix salaries of all teachers. He even fixed stipends for students so that they might concentrate on their studies.

In this way, the cream of the Muslim community chose to be teachers and the literacy rate jumped to 70-80 percent in Arabia. So, a global revolution was caused by these great educators. It is deduced that if a nation wants to improve, prosper and progress in all fields of life, they will have to dedicate themselves to education and their cream must choose the profession of teaching as their top priority.

Evolution of Teaching as a Profession in Islam

Islam came as a torch bearer of knowledge and declared Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as a model of excellence as Allah says in the *Qur'ān*:

Verily, there is a set pattern in the Prophet of Allah for you.¹

From this verse of the *Qur'ān*, it is very much clear that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is a role model for the whole mankind in all walks of life as a shepherd, merchant, husband, father, grandfather, student, friend, judge, commander in chief, leader and teacher. He is a model of excellence for the whole of mankind to follow. While constructing Ka'aba, *Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm* and *Ḥaḍrat Ismā'īl* both prayed to Allah Almighty as:

Our Lord! Send amongst them a Messenger of their own {and indeed Allah answered their invocation by sending Muhammad (ﷺ)} who shall recite unto them Your verses and instruct them in the Book (this *Qur'ān*) and *Al-Ḥikmah* and purify them. Verily! You are All- Almighty and All-Wise.²

Allah granted this supplication of *Ḥaḍrat Ibrāhīm* and *Ḥaḍrat Ismā'īl* and sent Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as a teacher and this is an important aspect of his personality that he was an outstanding teacher. It is clear from the way he conveyed Allah's message to his people and groomed them in a wonderful way. This verse reveals that Allah himself gifted him to be an ideal teacher. Allah says in the *Qur'ān*:

As (to complete My blessings on you), We have sent among you a Messenger (Muhammad) of your own, reciting to you Our verses (the *Qur'ān*) and purifying you, and teaching you the Book and the *Ḥikmah* and teaching you that which you used not to know.³

Furthermore, Allah says:

Indeed Allah conferred a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from among themselves, reciting unto them His verses and purifying them, and instructing them in the Book and *Al-Ḥikmah*, while before that they had been in manifest error.⁴

These verses of the *Qur'ān* clearly indicate that this was the special blessing of Allah by sending Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as a teacher with some significant assignments of reciting and teaching *Qur'ānic* verses, cleansing, teaching them *Ḥikmah* and what they did not know. Once Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) entered the *Masjid* in Madīnah and saw his companions sitting in two circles. In one circle, the people were busy in meditating and glorifying God. The people in the second circle were busy in acquiring and imparting knowledge to one another. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Both of them are busy in good deeds, but I have been sent as a Teacher", he joined the circle of knowledge.⁵ This *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (ﷺ) encourages the believers to adopt teaching as their profession. In another *ḥadīth*, the Prophet (ﷺ) says:

Verily, Allah did not send me as a warner to people, rather as a gentle teacher to people.⁶

About the respect of a teacher, he says that a man has three parents: firstly, his physical parents are those who are the cause of his existence, secondly, those who give him their daughter and thirdly, those who equip him with the power of knowledge.⁷ This *ḥadīth* of the Prophet is very important for understanding a very honourable status of a teacher in a society that his status is equal to that of parents and is considered as a spiritual father as well. The Prophet (ﷺ) has also described himself as a fatherly teacher and his word would touch everyone's heart. Mr Sahin Sahari writes in his article:

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)'s communication abilities, teaching skills and his teaching behaviour made him an effective instructor in the field of teaching.⁸

The Prophet (ﷺ) realized that according to the verses revealed to him, he had to instruct people in scripture and wisdom. Furthermore, he had to guide them on the right path by giving glad tidings and warnings. Hence, he felt that the right tool to fulfil his mission was education. Thereafter, he started teaching masses in different places and adopted various methods as well. He taught in a variety of settings such as private homes, hillocks and open spaces, in *Ka'bah*, in the mosques of *Madīnah*, while riding, in the desert and in grave yards too. He left no stone unturned to teach his people. Therefore, he established the first school in the house of *Ḥaḍrat Arqam* (RA) where he would teach his companions. He would engage his companions in his sweet, loving but effective teaching approaches.⁹

Before his migration to *Madīnah*, in 12th year of Prophet hood (621 A.D), when the second pledge of *Uqabah* was taken by twelve people from *Madīnah*, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) sent *Ḥaḍrat Mus'ab Bin 'Umair* (RA), as first Muslim ambassador and teacher who stayed with *As'ad Bin Zurarah Anṣārī* in his house. *Ḥaḍrat Mus'ab Bin 'Umair* was instructed by the Prophet (ﷺ):

Teach the people of *Madīnah* the *Qur'ān*, the teachings of Islam and create their understanding about Islam.¹⁰

This was the first institution established in *Madīnah* and the second one in the history of Islam where these three companions would teach the helpers how to recite the *Qur'ān* and to pray. They also focused on the preaching of Islam in *Madīnah*. *Ḥaḍrat 'Abdullāh Bin Sa'īd Bin Al-Āaṣ* (RA) would teach them how to write because he had an excellent hand writing. The impact of this educational effort was amazing because about seventy-three people came to *Makkah* next year to embrace Islam and caused the great migration of the Prophet and his companions to *Madīnah*.¹¹ Mr Sahin Sahari writes in his article:

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is credited with bringing to the world a concept of knowledge and a system of education. This system was most suited to the need for the spread of his message and mission.¹²

The Prophet (ﷺ) had clearly realized that educational movement is the key to bring about an everlasting revolution in a society that is why teachers were sent to pave the way for this change. Soon after his migration to *Madīnah*, a masjid was constructed so that the Muslims could worship Allah here and educational activities could be initiated. The roots of the Muslim educational system can be traced back to the early days of Islam, when Prophet Muhammad used to sit among his companions to expound the injunctions of the *Qur'ān* and to instruct them in the teachings of Islam. His assembly was destined to set the pattern for educational instruction during the subsequent centuries. Masjid al-Nabwī, where he habitually convened his majlis, was not only the seat of the first educational grooming in the Muslim history, it also came to set a tradition for the mosques as such to be also seat of learning.¹³ So *Ṣuffah* academy was established in this masjid where the Prophet's companions would stay and learn from him. This was a residential institution where mostly boarders used to stay and mostly, they were very poor having no food to satiate their hunger and no clothes to cover their bodies with. Their teacher and caretaker was none but the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) who would provide them with what they would need, and even teach them in night classes.

The approximate number of these students was 400. Even the Prophet employed Ḥaḍrat ‘Ubadah Bin Ṣāmit (RA) as a Teacher Assistant because the Prophet did not know how to write and the teacher assistant was assigned the task of teaching students how to write.¹⁴ In this academy, there were three kinds of students:

- Firstly, the boarders.
- Secondly, day scholars like emigrants and helpers as they were busy in their trade and agriculture at day time. Yet, they were very regular in their classes. Sometimes, some students had the understanding with others to attend classes on rotation-basis.
- Thirdly, classes were taken by this great teacher of mankind at home as women would attend lessons in the house of the Prophet (ﷺ) as *Sūrah Aḥzāb* clearly tells us about it. Ḥaḍrat ‘Āisha was the prefect and teacher assistant as she was very intelligent and wise having one-third knowledge of Islam.¹⁵

In 2nd Year A.H, the Battle of *Badr*, took place and 70 prisoners of war came into the custody of Muslims. They were treated kindly. Some were freed on ransom, while some old and poor captives were freed without any ransom. The learned prisoners were assigned the task of teaching Muslim children for a fixed time, after which they were set free. This event is very significant as it teaches mankind many lessons:

- The ransom for the freedom of a prisoner was, at that time, 4000 dirhams which were a huge amount. On the other hand, Muslims were very poor and urgently needed cash amount so that they could meet their basic needs.
- Anyhow, the Prophet (ﷺ) preferred education because he was a great teacher who could easily realize its importance.

The Prophet (ﷺ) always tried to spread Islam and its knowledge. For this purpose, he would send his prominent companions as teachers to various nooks and corners of Arabia. Therefore, he encouraged others to adopt teaching as a profession. Due to these efforts, there was an unbelievable revolution in Arabia which changed the whole course of human history and left an indelible mark on the world forever. In the outset, there were only 17 or 18 literate people in Arabia when the Prophet (ﷺ) started the preaching of Islam, and when the Prophet (ﷺ) left this world after 23 years, the literacy rate in Arabia had reached 70-80 percent.¹⁶

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) revolutionized the minds and hearts of the people of Arabia whom no civilized nation wanted to rule. Anyhow, they were totally changed and groomed by the Prophet (ﷺ) as global leaders. For example:

- He groomed Ḥaḍrat *Abū Bakr* and Ḥaḍrat *‘Umar* (RA) as rulers and intellectuals.
- Ḥaḍrat *Khālīd Bin Walīd* and *‘Amr Bin Al ‘Āaṣ* (RA) as great generals and conquerors
- Ḥaḍrat *‘Abdullāh Bin ‘Abbās* and Ḥaḍrat *‘Abdullāh Bin Mas‘ūd* (RA) as great educator and teachers.
- Ḥaḍrat *‘Alī Bin Abī Ṭālib* and Ḥaḍrat *‘Abdullāh Bin Mas‘ūd* (RA) as great judges and jurists
- Ḥaḍrat *Zaid Bin Thābit* and Ḥaḍrat *Mu‘ādh Bin Jabal* (RA) as experts in the knowledge of inheritance and *Halāl and Harām*.
- Ḥaḍrat *‘Abdullāh Bin ‘Umar* (RA) as a strict follower of the Prophet’s *Sunnah*.
- Ḥaḍrat *Abū Hurairah* (RA) as a memorizer of the Prophet’s *Aḥādīth*.

The Prophetic era can truly be considered as the ‘Golden Age’ of Islam as the Prophet (ﷺ) educated and empowered the *Ṣaḥāba* by touching and transforming their lives. He did not merely transmit knowledge, rather he effected a complete transformation among

the *Ṣaḥāba* by showing them how to live by the *Qur'ān*.¹⁷

Such an outstanding transformation of the Arab society took place due to the peerless educational efforts of a great educator of mankind. A desert was converted into a green and beautiful garden by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Its various flowers spread their sweet fragrance to the nooks and corners of the world.

The Rightly Guided Caliphs of Islam also focused on the spread of Islam and knowledge and thus continued the legacy of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). *Ḥaḍrat Abū Bakr* (RA) could not concentrate on education more because of three main problems:

1. Various false prophets rose at various places of Arabia.
2. Revolt in the capital from the side of various tribes.
3. The reluctance in sending a military expedition under the command of *Ḥaḍrat Usama Bin Zaid* (RA) to Syria.

Yet, the educational system established by the Prophet (ﷺ) continued to function in a smooth way as he got the *Qur'ān* compiled from *Ḥaḍrat Zaid Bin Thābit* (RA) and it was a tremendous contribution from the side of *Ḥaḍrat Abū Bakr* (RA).

Ḥaḍrat 'Umar (RA) got sufficient and more peaceful time to rule and focus on educational activities. He developed more effective and efficient system of administration particularly in education. He motivated people to have the profession of teaching as he fixed even the salaries for teachers. Early education was brought under the supervision of the state. He also appointed visiting teachers who were tasked to catch up illiterate people to motivate and engage them in villages and towns like *Abū Sufyān*, a well-known visiting teacher.¹⁸

Ḥaḍrat 'Umar had also sent instructions to his governors to fix the salaries of teachers.¹⁹ He had also encouraged female companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) to establish academies at homes and teach. He would also appoint new teachers on vacant positions in the newly conquered areas during his caliphate. He would also send various major companions as teachers to different places. He also appointed major companions as head teachers at various places.²⁰ He also set a criterion for the selection of teachers and fixed their salaries for them. In this way, he gave a very efficient system for educational institutions. It is interesting to note that the most competent companions were appointed as teachers. They were not ordinary people, rather were outstanding educators and were highly recommended by the Prophet (ﷺ). Their capability, piety, command over their subjects, commitment to the cause of teaching, their affection and sincerity, their knowledge about human psychology and their rich experience were unparalleled.

Owing to these substantial efforts of *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar* to the cause of education, literacy rate rose tremendously in the Muslim state. In the Battle of *Qādisiyya*, the Persian commander was amazed to discover that Muslims are highly sophisticated and educated. He was even indignant with *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar* (RA) because of his sincere efforts for the sake of education and had to give vent to his spleen on that occasion by saying:

'Umar has eaten my liver as he teaches manners and reason to dogs.²¹

During the rule of *Ḥaḍrat 'Uthmān* (RA), the legacy of *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar* was carried on. A commission of four companions headed by *Ḥaḍrat Zaid Bin Thābit* (RA) was appointed to compile the *Qur'ān* according to the *Quraish* dialect and the copy of *Ḥaḍrat Hafsa* (RA). So a standard recipe was prepared and spread in the Muslim state and it consequently, unified the Muslim *Ummah* that is why he is named as *Jāmi'ul Qur'ān*. Furthermore, he appointed *Qurrā* (reciters of the *Qur'ān*) for teaching people the exact recitation of the *Qur'ān* and they were sent to *Madīnah*, *Makkah*, *Kūfah*,

Başrah and Syria respectively. People were also instructed to recite the *Qur'ān* according to the recitation of these teachers. He also fixed the salaries for *Mu'azinīn* (callers for the congregational prayer) and teachers.²²

Ḥaḍrat 'Alī (R A) was a great teacher but his caliphate passed in internal conflicts. So he could not focus on further progression of education at that time. Despite, the companions were always engaged in the process of teaching and learning. His wise sayings about the spread of knowledge, teachers and students are unforgettable in the history of Islam.

Ḥaḍrat 'Umar Bin 'Abdul 'Azīz also worked for the spread of Islam and promotion of teaching as a profession. He had sent instructions to his governors to promote education in the state. He had also appointed visiting teachers to ensure the education of illiterate people in the society like *Yazīd Bin Abī Mālīk* and *Hāris Bin Abī Muhammad Ash'arī*. He concentrated on the betterment of teachers' financial status and life standard as well. Once, he came to know about the extreme poverty of a teacher named *Qāsim Bin Mughīrah*, a traditionist, paid his debts and fixed 50 dirhams as his stipend.²³

He always wanted to overcome the financial straits of teachers and, therefore, he sent a letter to the governors to fix the salaries of all such teachers who have dedicated themselves to the profession of teaching. Furthermore, he also issued official orders to his governors to fix stipend even for students so that they could dedicate themselves to the acquisition of knowledge.

Conclusion

The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs and *'Umar Bin 'Abdul 'Azīz* always tried their level best to bring about a revolution in the system of education, highly encouraged others to be teachers and bring about a drastic change in the Muslim society. In this way, the profession of teaching was promoted, the cream of the Muslim community chose to be teachers and the literacy rate jumped to 70-80 percent in Arabia, so, a global revolution was caused by these great educators. In a nutshell, education is an engine for progress as it shapes the destiny of the countries that prioritize education, invest in quality schools, teachers' education and ensure equitable access to learning opportunities are better positioned to realize economic growth, foster innovation, reduce inequalities, and enhance overall well-being. The path to a brighter future for any country begins with a commitment to education and their cream must choose the profession of teaching as their top priority.

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