

Muhammad as an Ideal Teacher

Sahin Sahari , Asst. Teacher Jonepur High School, North 24 Parganas
Sushovan Koner, ABS Academy, Durgapur -713211, West Bengal, India
Bapan Sing, Research Scholar Department of Education, University of Kalyani, Kalyani , Nadia -741235

Introduction

"No revolution in history, if we except that affected by the religion of the Gospel, has introduced greater changes into the state of the civilized world than that which has grown out of the rise, progress and permanence of Muhammadanism"

- George Bush

Basically all the prophets, irrespective of the professions they practiced, were teachers as they were supposed to convey the message of God to human beings. (The Qur'an 14:4) Mostly their students were common people and they adopted different methodologies and strategies to teach different strata or variety of people. Generally they taught both in hostile and favourable settings. Even though they could not be compared to the present day teachers in classroom and school settings, we can study their approach to the process of teaching and the effects it had produced on the people and in society.

Muhammad was a prophet and a teacher in the peninsular Arabia in the 7th century after Christ. According to the following verses of the Qur'an, he was chosen by God, as a prophet and a teacher to teach God's laws to mankind and guide them in the right path. *"It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered, a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in the Book and wisdom, - although they had been, before, in manifest error"*. (The Qur'an 62:2). A similar verse of the Qur'an confirms that the prophet has been sent by God as a teacher to instruct people in scripture, wisdom and in new knowledge. (2: 151)

Once Muhammad entered into the Mosque in Madinah 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. Saying, *"Both of them are busy in good deeds, but I have been sent as a Teacher"*, he joined the circle of knowledge. (Ibn-e-Majah, 2004, Vol.1, Hadith No.229, p.136). While delivering a sermon one day, Prophet Muhammad said *"Behold, My Lord commanded me that I should teach you that which you do not know and that which he has taught me today"*. (Muslim, 1971, p. 1488). Semaan remarks, *"His activity was not only that of a prophet, as we know such activity from Biblical sources, but also*

among other functions of a teacher in the classical sense". Thus Muhammad was a confirmed teacher to mankind by the authority of God in the widest and true sense of the word.

Keywords : a teacher leader, Style, Creative Ideas, Sense of Humour, Motivational Expertise, novelty, intellect

Objectives of this paper

Objective of this paper is to describe and explain the teacher quality, teacher traits of mohammad .

Data Source

This paper is solely based on secondary information those are collected from the different sources like books, religious books articles, websites etc.

Muhammad as a teacher leader

His role as a teacher at Makkah was different. At Makkah he started his mission secretly and remained so for quite some time. He had to lead his companions in a hostile atmosphere. The word was to be spread from mouth to mouth in an atmosphere of uncertainty, fear and hostility. Although the basic teaching was defined, revelations of all comprehensive clear instructions were awaited. In an atmosphere of expectation and hanging, the relationship between the preacher and the followers turned out to be more personal and intimate. (Irfan, 2004, p.253) Soon the number of followers swelled and the offering of prayers became an open affair. Their personal safety and free living were under threat. But Muhammad the teacher leader and his guidance were a source of great strength to his followers in a hostile atmosphere. His moral and psychological support to all his followers made them to remain his staunch supporters forever.

His role in Madinah was completely different where the prophet became the acknowledged leader. He established a mosque which was used not only for the purpose of prayer but also as a centre of learning. Teaching by the prophet became more or less an everyday affair. The prophet motivated his companions highly and facilities were provided to teach literacy skills. In course of time the number of schools increased, a religious and secular curriculum developed and more of prophet's companions became expert teachers. To encourage physical education the prophet had expressed special approval of four leisure time activities. According to Jabir, "Everytliing else besides praying to God is frivolous except four. These are archery, horsemanship, swimming and amusing oneself in

the company of one's wife." (Abu Dawud, as quoted by Chaudhri, 1999, p. 346). Thus the prophet as a great teacher leader influenced his students and colleagues and led them into a process of great educational revolution.

Teaching Traits of Muhammad

According to McEwan (2002), teaching traits connote what the effective teacher does to get results. These traits include "With-it-ness", "Style", "Motivational Expertise" and "Instructional Effectiveness"

With-it-ness

"With-it-ness" of an effective teacher indicates his awakening towards the cause of education, leading him to think about the classroom organization and its management, and the engagement of students. The prophet has described himself as a fatherly teacher of his people whose word touched everything (Abu Dawud, 2003, Vol.1, p.2). The prophet realized that according to the verses revealed to him he has to instruct people in scripture and wisdom. Further he had to guide humanity in the right path by giving glad tidings and warnings. Hence, he felt that the right tool to fulfill his mission was education. Thereafter he started teaching the masses in different places, adopting various strategies. He taught in a variety of settings such as private homes, hillocks and open spaces, in Ka'bah at Makkah, and in the mosques of Madinah, while riding, in the desert and in grave yards too. He was able to engage his companions and the public by his effective teaching methodologies and psychological approaches.

Style

The teaching style of an effective teacher comprises of "Finding your Own Style", "Humour", "Creativity", "Novelty" and "Substance".

Prophet's command over the language was extraordinary as he was brought up by the tribe of Bani Sa'd bin Bakr known for the chastity of their language. Once he himself pronounced that he was the most eloquent person among the Arabs. (Qazi Ayaz, as quoted by Alam, 1991, p.35). He used to lecture regularly to his companions who gathered around him after every prayer. They were allowed to question him on any matter on religion and human relationship. Whenever he wanted to stress a point, he used to repeat it thrice. (Bukhari 1971, Vol.1, p.77) Similarly to attract the attention of the listeners and to make them curious, he used to ask questions, make them think and answer them later. (Bukhari, 1971, Vol.1, p.52) On some occasions he used to narrate stories to make clear some points.

Another element of his style was to render ideas of religion as simple as possible. He said thrice "Teach the religion and make it easy". (Bukhari, 1971, Vol.1, p.60) If he had to select anyone out of the two, he used to select the easier one provided it was not a matter of sin. He was a very time conscious person and used to make his speeches short and crisp, lest it may bore the listeners. (Bukhari, 1971, Vol.1, p.60) His speeches are intermingled with humour. Sometimes he used to answer questions followed by demonstration. Once when somebody asked him about the method of doing ablution, he called for water and practically showed him the way of doing ablution. He used to teach systematically point by point. When he sent Muaad to Yemen to preach Islam to those people, he told him, "Since you are going to preach to the people of the Book namely Jews and Christians, please call them towards the basic tenet of Islam, namely There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet'. If they accept it, then tell them that God had made the five times prayer compulsory. If they accept it too, tell them that God had made obligatory on their part to pay the poor-due (Zakat) and that had to be collected from the rich and distributed to the poor". Sometimes he used to draw the attention of the people by clapping hands and sometimes by means of making oaths. Abu Shurayh reported that the Prophet said, "By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!" The companions asked him' "Who is that person, O Allah's Messenger?" He said, "That person is he whose neighbour is not safe from his evil" (Bukhari, 1971, Vol.8, p.28)

He very frequently used similes and metaphors to explain his points. Some examples are given below.

"Each of you is the mirror of his brother. So if he sees any fault in him, he should wipe it away from him". (Tirmidhi, 2000, Hadith No. 1286)

"Avoid envy, for envy devours good deeds just as fire devours fuel". (Abu Dawud, 2003, Vol. 3, p.1366)

"If you entirely depend on God, He will give you food as he gives to the birds. The birds set out in the morning with empty stomach but return in the evening with their stomach filled". (Tirmidhi, 2000, Hadith No. 1403)

"Imagine there is a river in front of your house. If any one takes bath in it five times a day will there be any dirt in his body? Similarly God cleanses all your sins if you pray five times a day". (Bukhari, 1971, Vol.1, p.301)

During the return march to Madinah after the victories of IV Iakkah and Hunayn the prophet said to some of his companions: "We have returned from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war." And when one of them asked :

"What is the greater holy war, O Messenger of God?" he answered: "The war against the soul." (Lings, 1983, p.327).

Sense of Humour

There were lighter moments in the prophet's life which revealed the sense of humour in him. Never was he found laughing heartily but he always used to smile. (Bukhari, 1971, Vol.8, p.74) He used to joke with his companions but even in joking he never said anything but the truth. (Tirmidhi, 1962, Vol.4, p.357) The companions saw nothing wrong with joking or having fun, as they saw the prophet their leader and teacher, occasionally doing so. There are many delightful reports about the jokes exchanged between the prophet and his companions.

Anas ibn Malik narrated that once there was an old lady who came to see the prophet and sought after his prayer and blessings so that she could enter the paradise. The prophet replied that no old person could enter paradise. The old lady was much upset and started crying. The prophet smiled and replied that no old person could go to paradise because God makes those who enter paradise young again. Hence she would enter paradise not as an old lady but as a young virgin.

A man came to the prophet to ask him to give him a beast to ride. The prophet jokingly told him, "I will give you the offspring of a she-camel to ride."

He said, "O Messenger of Allah, what will I do with the offspring of a shecamel?"

The prophet said: "Are riding-camels born except from she-camels?"

One of the hadiths that reflects the prophet's sense of humour and enjoyment of fun is the report from his wife Ayesha who said: "I went out with the prophet on a journey. At that time I was a young girl and was quite slender.

The prophet said to me, 'Come, and let us have a race.' So I raced with him, and I won. He let me rest until I had gained weight. Later, I accompanied him on another journey. He said to me, 'Come, and let us have a race.' So I raced with him, and he won. He began to laugh, and said, 'This is for that.'

Creative Ideas

The prophet used to expose quite a lot of creative ideas in the field of teaching as well as in other fields. Once the prophet assigned to some of the captives of the battle of Badr to educate ten men each and thus secure their release. This may be considered as one of the earliest adult education programmes of the world. It was also his creative style to modify the traditional proverbs of his time and make them suitable to drive his own teachings. There was an old proverb that said: "Let lose the camel but assign its protection to God." When somebody asked the prophet about it, he slightly modified it and said "Tie the camel and assign its protection to God." Some of his companions were specially assigned the task of writing the revelations which the prophet recited and thus made it available to the entire humanity later. He made the mosque at Madinah a central educational institution of that day. A part of the mosque called "suffah" was made available for the poor and needy to stay and learn. Women were encouraged to acquire knowledge and the prophet conducted special classes for them.

Another dimension of his style was that he never used to get upset or angry even if someone put awkward questions. Instead he used to correct them by asking thought-provoking questions. Once a young man requested the prophet to permit him to indulge in illegitimate sexual relationship. The prophet's companions were upset and looked at the young man angrily. But the prophet invited the young man to come and sit nearer to him. He asked him how he would feel if somebody aspired to have the same type of relationship with his mother, sister or aunt. The young man vehemently said that he would never allow such things to happen. Thereafter the prophet convinced him, advised him, kept his hand on his head and prayed for him.

Novelty

It was a novel method of the prophet to make his companions and followers abide by his teaching by making them to take a pledge. In the second Aqabah pledge the Ansars from Madinah held the hand of the prophet and promised that they would listen and obey him in all circumstances, to spend for the cause of God in plenty as well as in scarcity, to enjoin good and forbid evil, fear the censure of none in the path of God and defend the prophet in case he sought their help.

To fuse a sense of brotherhood between the emigrants from Makkah and the natives of Madinah the prophet introduced a novel method. He requested each native of Madinah to adopt one emigrant from Makkah as his brother and share with him all that he could share. This had kindled a spirit of selfishness among the natives of Madinah who shared everything, the land, the orchards, the business and other properties.

Substance

The prophet 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. In fact the prophet laid more emphasis on knowledge than on worship as he regarded the learned superior to the devout. The curriculum he developed maintained a balance between the material as well as the spiritual dimensions. He enjoined upon the people to seek and impart knowledge for a better living in this world and a more blissful and eternal living in the hereafter.

Motivational Expertise

This trait explains the personal teaching efficacy of the prophet in motivating his companions to bring out the best in them in their behaviour as well as in academics.

For the prophet, Qur'an, the Book of God, was a powerful tool to motivate his companions to engage themselves in the process of teaching and learning.

The very first verse, which was revealed to the prophet, tells about reading, writing, teaching and acquiring knowledge. "Read! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created; Created man out of a leech-like clot. Read! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful, He who taught the use of the pen, taught man that which he knew not" (The Qur'an 96:1- 5) The following verse clearly makes distinction between those who possess knowledge and those who do not. "Say: Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition". (The Qur'an 39: 9).

The next verse says that those who possess knowledge fear God. "Those truly fear God, among His servants who have knowledge" (The Qur'an 35: 28)

Therefore they have to pray "O my Lord, Increase me in knowledge"

Though he himself was 'ummi' (unlettered) the prophet taught his followers the importance of acquisition of knowledge and spread the same to others. The prophet used to stress that whosoever had learnt knowledge should spread it to others lest he would incur the wrath of God. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud narrates that Allah's Messenger told him to acquire knowledge and impart it to the people....for he was a person who had to depart this world (Tirmidhi, 2000, Hadith No.107).

He motivated them by quoting the benefits they acquire in this world as well as in the here-after.

He said that the most superior among you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it. (Bukhari, 1971, Vol.6, p.502).

The prophet motivated his companions by saying, "He who comes to this mosque of mine and he comes only to learn a good, his status is like that of one who strives in the cause of God. He who comes for any other motive, his status is like that of a person who covets the property of another". (Tirmidhi, 2000, Hadith No.244)

Once the messenger of God came out and said, "Which of you would like to go out every morning to Buthan or Al-Aqiq and bring two large she-camels without being guilty of sin or without severing the ties of kinship?" His companions said, "Messenger of God, we would like to do it". Upon this he said, "Is there not one of you go out in the morning to the mosque and teach *or* recite two verses from the Book of God, the Majestic and Glorious? That is better for him than two camel, and three verses are better than three shecamels and four verses are better for him than four she-camels and so on their numbers in camels'. (Muslim, 1971, p. 385)

The prophet firmly believed that by making the people literate and thereby motivating them to acquire knowledge would solve many theological controversies and social evils present at that time. Many of his proverbs vociferously advocated the importance of education and immensely encouraged his followers to devote themselves to the process learning more than anything else.

The prophet ordained that it was compulsory to all Muslims both men and women to acquire knowledge. Such learning, he commented, was better for a person than this world and the hereafter. He would even appreciate if somebody had taken some effort even to go to a distant land like China to gain some knowledge. Such people, he said, were in the path of God and they were the true Inheritors of the prophet. The prophet preferred such people more than the people who were highly devout.

Reminding his companions of the benefits they would obtain in the hereafter by acquiring knowledge in this world, the prophet said such persons' intercession would be accepted in the hereafter and God would make easy their path towards paradise. Those people who acquired knowledge and taught it to others would be resurrected as leaders in the hereafter. Further the writing of the learned would be weighed against the sacrifices of the martyrs.

He gave such an importance to learning that once while he was delivering a sermon, he was told that a stranger had come to learn about the religion. He immediately left the sermon, sat with him and began teaching. He even allotted one day a week to teach women exclusively. Though he taught his disciples orally, he made arrangements to get his revelations as well his actions recorded.

After the battle of Badr, when the enemy prisoners of war requested the prophet to free them without ransom, he told each one of them who could read and write to teach his companions to read and write and get his release.

Another important psychological tool used by the prophet was motivation by appreciation. He used to lavishly appreciate his companions' talents, capacities and their conduct and character. The titles he conferred on some of his companions such as 'Saifullah (The Sword of God)' to Khalid bin Waleed, 'Ameenul Ummat' (The Protector of the Community) to Abu Ubaidah are still remembered today.

It was one of his motivational tactics that he would never hesitate to offer concessions to people depending on the existing conditions and circumstances. Even though he wanted to extend his prayer time he used to cut short it whenever he heard the children crying. When a camel driver expressed his inability to join the long congregational prayer in the night conducted by Mu'aad ibn Jabal, the Prophet advised Mu'aad to recite small verses to make it comfortable to everybody.

The motivational expertise of the prophet had a tremendous effect on his companions which changed their very conduct and character in complete contrast to what they had been in the "Period of Ignorance". Further the thirst for knowledge which the prophet kindled in them made them great students and teachers seeking knowledge mainly in the field of theology and in course of time in the secular fields too.

Instructional Effectiveness

Prophet Muhammad's communication abilities, teaching skills and his teaching behaviour made him an effective instructor in the field of teaching. He was a cheerful person and his well defined instructions and guidance had a tremendous effect on his companions and followers. His instructions used to be neither very short nor fast but clear so that any person sitting by his side could remember what he said. He spoke concisely with fewer words with more meaning.

As a teacher who would never like a compromise with his basic beliefs, Prophet Muhammad's answers used to be decisive and sincere. Faith was perhaps the strongest moving force behind his personality. The success behind his effectiveness lies in the fact that he himself was a perfect model and a beautiful example of what he instructed to others. He had the natural ability to apply the principles of learning in his system of teaching. He was particular that the messages delivered should be understood by the masses and prohibited anything which was beyond the comprehension of the common people. Any important instructions he used to repeat three times and his choice of words, clarity of purpose and way of presentation would definitely impress the listeners.

Prophet Muhammad had a large group of companions who were highly devoted, faithful, loyal and sincere. They listened to all that he said, acted on all his instructions and practiced what was taught to them. Whenever a passage of the Qur'an was revealed to the prophet, he used to recite it back to his companions.

All such revelations were committed to memory as well as to writing by his companions who used to stay in turn outside the prophet's house throughout the day and night. They were a source of great strength to the prophet.

When advising individuals he used to talk to them, taking into account their psychological status, strengths and weaknesses and needs. Once he advised a person extensively on fear of God, importance of Jihad, remembering God and reading His Book, the necessity to keep his tongue under control and on another occasion he advised another person to control his anger. When the person requested him to advise him further, he stressed the same thing again and again. Thus the prophet was able to select need based and appropriate approaches for effective instruction.

During Tabuk expedition, when there was a call from the prophet to donate liberally for the cause of God, the people responded positively and the things donated were heaped up like a mountain. Omer brought half of his entire belongings whereas Abu Bakr donated all he had. A companion, out of his hard labour throughout the night, brought half a kilo of date fruits, which he earned as his wages. The prophet honoured him by keeping the little fruits he brought on the top of the things donated and made him happy.

His instructions were effective because of the freedom he gave to the people in certain matters, to perform his instructions as per their status and capacity. Once he said, "Whenever you see an evil, try to stop it with your hands, if not with your tongue and if you are not able to do so, at least hate it in

your heart. However the third position indicates the weakest status of the believer'. (Muslim, 1999, Vol.2, Hadith No.175, p.212)

His careful planning, systematic execution and the time given for change were important factors which resemble the research based teaching behaviour of modern times. Regarding consumption of alcohol the first remark made in the Qur'an which he delivered to the people was that there are some good as well as some bad in it and the evils are more than the good. Later it was ordered that people should not enter the mosque for prayer in an inebriated condition. After sometime, drinking was totally prohibited. But the response of the people was tremendous and overwhelming as the prophet's instructions prepared them mentally for a social change in a phased manner.

Intellectual Traits of Muhammad

The intellectual traits of a person can be understood by his depth of knowledge, ability to deal with difficult and dangerous situations and his mental life.

- Prophet Muhammad was an illiterate, not taught by a teacher in a formal school setting and did not have any formal training to teach. But he was highly resourceful and knowledgeable and was teaching by the authority of God. (The Qur'an 6.44, 16.64, 62.2). It is said the prophet as a special favour from God to humanity, brought the Qur'an through revelation, interpreted it and implemented the same. Beside the revelations from God, the Qur'an was the book from which he learnt and derived immense knowledge from it. According to his wife Ayesha his conduct was a personification of the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an says that he always acted wisely and invited people with wisdom. (2:151, 16:125, 62:2) Thus the prophet became the great scholar of the Qur'an in which he had an in depth knowledge. As far as the prophet was concerned 'wisdom' refers to the intelligent interpretation of the revelations received and converting them in the form of actions which later came to be known as the traditions of the prophet.
- Street smart teachers consider literacy and education are vital factors for the progress of mankind and strive hard even under difficult circumstances to spread the same. They give much importance to the process of learning through reading, writing, listening and experience. When Prophet Muhammad started his mission he realized that he had to educate his people to enable them to receive the message of God. But the period in

which he started his mission was called the Period of Ignorance in which the people were highly corrupt morally and educationally. The Arabs of the pre-Islamic period were groping about in darkness and ignorance, entangled in a mesh of superstitions paralyzing their kind and driving them to lead an animal like life. Woman was a marketable commodity and was regarded as a piece of inanimate property. Inter-tribal relationships were fragile. Avarice for wealth and involvement in futile wars were the main objectives that governed their chiefs' self-centered policies. Most of them were illiterates. Practically there were no written work and they practised only oral communication. It was a very difficult situation which the prophet faced.

But by the spiritual and intellectual mission of Muhammad it is observed these nomads were transformed into the representatives of truth and dignity and became a group of noble souls. All these changes happened within a period of twenty three years.

- Traits such as "Meta Cognitive", "Strategic", "Reflective", "Communicative", "Responsive" etc constitute the mental life of an effective teacher.

The prophet's plan to migrate to Madinah and its precise execution proved him to be a wonderful strategist and a man of wisdom. When Muhammad came to know that the Quraish had plotted to kill him, he told his friend Abu Bakr to keep ready two horses and was waiting for the command of God. In the mean time the chiefs of Makkah assigned eleven men to assassinate the prophet who surrounded his house in the night. Having received God's order to migrate, the prophet made his cousin AN to cover himself fully and sleep in his bed and left the house. Then with Abu Bakr the prophet took a road in the south, instead of the usual road to Madinah in the north. They stayed in a cave called Thawr for three nights. He made arrangements through Abu Bakr's son to appraise them about the latest situation in Makkah. According to his plan, a non-Muslim guide brought two camels and guided them to Madinah in an unfamiliar route.

The Hudaibiyah agreement was a simple example for his critical thinking and farsightedness where he agreed to sign the treaty, even though some of the terms and conditions were not favourable to Muslims and most of his companions were not for signing the agreement. Later the agreement turned to be a blessing in disguise to the Muslims.

Conclusion

Prophet Muhammad had a fairly long time of twenty three years to achieve his objectives and had the advantage of becoming Arabia's undisputed political leader in his lifetime. He was able to bring in the reforms which he envisaged. His teachings had a far reaching effect after his death. He could successfully motivate people towards fruitful learning, employed a variety of methods to teach, established educational institutions and administrative systems and provided guidelines to follow. His legacy brought in revolutionary changes in the world of education. Hence the Prophet, it can be deemed, was a successful teacher in his own lifetime.

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