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BATTLES OF THE PROPHET IN SEERAH CURRICULUM A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF ITS VALIDITY

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ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning through stories is an accepted principle. The curriculum requires highlighting historical stories, tales of national heroes and anecdotes of the glorious past of nations. This is general false assumption that war and victory stories evoke feelings of terrorism. How can stories of national victors who fought against oppressors, usurpers and invaders be instigators of terrorism? The Messenger of Allah fought for peace. He fought for the oppressed class. He accepted the bloodshed only when there was no other way. But some sections have raised the question that the true stories of the Prophet's conquests incite Muslim students to war. However, violent people are found in different races, religions and countries around the world Who go astray for any reason but no one learned violence from a curriculum story. This research paper addresses the question that terrorism is not related to the stories of Prophetic battles taught in the curriculum. The article is written in an analytical and critical mode.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of changing minds and developing human characters. The curriculum and the mentor are two core and indispensable components of this process. The curriculum offers the guidelines and sets the direction of mentors in the journey of academic excellence. The significance of curriculum demands that it must be designed carefully and purposely, specifying course description, aims and objectives, learning outcome, and the contents. Since human beings at all

stages of their life love to read and listen stories of various nature, particularly historical, it is quite pertinent to include in educational curricula history based on anecdotes. The stories leave deep impact on minds of students of all ages. A study accomplished by “Kang Lee and team” (Guardian, 2018) Concludes that moral story books affect the behavioral pattern of the reader or the learner, so much so that these stories interweave the magic of honesty among learners. It has been evidenced by another study undertaken by the “Ontario Institute for Studies in Education” (OISE) at the University of Toronto that realistic and genuine characters presented in stories had a greater impact on learners, thus helping them to learn better. (Craig, 2017)

The stories encompass a wide spectrum from lullabies & fibs to the factual reporting of historical events and legends. The educational curricula at tertiary levels the world over incorporate the stories narrating the history of a nations, civilizational developments, victories and biographies of the founders and heroes of nations. The survey of international curricula will confirm the fact that historical narratives of national heroes are integral parts the educational curricula of all nations. It is because survival and development of a nation and its civilization depends very much upon the loyalty and love of the learners towards their civilization and heroes.

The seerah is the biographical history of the last Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) that provides detailed information about his birth, Arab culture, tribal environment, his teachings, his mission, the enmity of pagans, migration, battles, victories and family life etc. The seerah based educational curriculum constitutes an integral part of Muslim education system. Some known and unknown circles of educationists and psychologists find stories of the Prophet’s battles disturbing and claim that these stories are bound to trigger tendencies of violence in the minds of students. This claim may not be logical from any angles whatsoever because the teaching and learning system of seerah based curriculum is devised keeping in view the objective to develop in the students an in-depth understanding of the true nature of the mission of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). That is why, the stories of the battles of the Prophet (s.a.w.) as part of seerah courses are meant to orientate learners to high moral characters, sincerity, honesty, generosity, bravery, and love for humanity in general. This paper will provide ample evidence to prove how the battle-stories of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) exert positive impact on the learner’s mind.

VIOLENCE STORIES IN NON-ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL CURRICULA

There is no history of any people or civilization which is free from stories of battles. Old civilizations like Egypt, Greek, Iran, India, and Rome seem to have made wars as part of their survival. Medieval period nations in European continent witnessed a series of bloody conflicts between England and France. In the modern and post-modern era innumerable wars were fought by almost all

leading world powers. All these wars and clashes are on the record and have made their way into educational curricula in all the continents. The Greek tales of wars appear to have been introduced in the European educational curricula right from primary level to tertiary level. These Greek stories are of military clashes, mutual frauds, and inhuman aggression. Dangerously enough, these stories include military contributions of legendary gods and goddesses. We see that the mythical epics of Homer are taught in western universities that contain stories of battles of gods and deities assassinating each other. (Angela Woollacott, 2013) The stories of battles as described ancient Hindu scriptures *Ramayana and Mahabharat* have been included in the curricula of Indian education. Both the Greek wars and ancient Indian wars are of no moral values at all. It may be claimed that the only objective of inclusion of these stories in educational curricula is to provide information about the past. But the fact is that the calculated objective of such curricula is to poison the students' minds and trigger in their psyche prejudice against others. One of the Indian organizations, Rashtriya Swam Sewak sangh (RSS), which is actually the main political player in India have already inserted the battle stories in its school curricula. The only objective of RSS for this is to instigate the sentiment of higher caste Hindu students against Muslims, and scheduled casts and tribes. In today's India the scenario of RSS vs the rest of Indian population is the natural climax and practical result of the curricula based on stories of Rāmāyana and Mahabhārat. It appears that the inclusion of these stories in Indian educational curricula is aimed at highlighting the following Justification of violence:

1. When sacrificing the life of any human being or animal to gods.
2. If someone surrenders his life for immolation.
3. When punishing the wrongdoers.
4. In a war to protect oneself or during a fight for sacred cause.
5. To feed oneself by killing even humans in times of starvation, shortage of food, and famishment. (V, 2019)

Ironically, the world leadership, international power players, and biased western intellectuals do not find anything wrong in the inclusion of battle stories recorded in ancient Indian scriptures and European anecdotes in educational curricula.

The fact is that these stories undoubtedly trigger violence in students and prepare them for terrorist activities against humanity at large.

Objectives of teaching seerah stories

Suitability of any academic subject should be decided in the light of its motives, objectives and expected learning outcomes because they set the direction of the process of teaching and learning. Incorporating battles stories in the seerah curriculum is not merely to accommodate them as part of the life of the Last

Prophet (s.a.w.); it is rather done in order to achieve some well-defined objectives. The most significant objectives of teaching and learning stories of the Prophet's life and mission are enumerated here below:

1-Highlighting Universality and Finality of the Prophet (S.A.W.):

The Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) was the Last Prophet: “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Apostle of Allah and the Last of the Prophets; and Allah is cognizant of all things” (The Qur'an, 33:40). He was and is universal Prophet: “Say: O people! Surely, I am the Apostle of Allah to you all” (The Qur'an, 7:158). Thus, each and every component of seerah courses is aimed at highlighting the two positions of the Prophet (S.A.W.). First, he is the Final Prophet of Allah; there is surely no prophet after him. If there is any claim by anyone to be a prophet after him, he/she is certainly a liar. Second, he is the Prophet of Allah for Arabs and non-Arabs, for blacks and whites, for Muslims and non-Muslims, for the people of his own time and the people after his time, for the north and the south, and for the east and the west.

2-Helping Students Understand Unique Features of the Prophet's Battles:

The sources have recorded around 27 battles, major and minor, fought during the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.). Only 4-5 battles were major ones and the remaining 22-23 were mere military expeditions. In the major battles, Badr, Uḥud, Aḥzāb, Ḥunayn, and Khaybar losses on both sides quite minimum. It is merely because the Prophet (s.a.w.) avoided mass bloodshed in battles. Generally, in the non-Islamic world wars have been waged and are still being waged with an intention of inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. The Prophet's battles were all defensive. One may claim that Ḥunayn, Khaybar and Tabūk were offensive, and in no way defensive. In the seerah courses the students are shared with true picture of the battles of the Prophet. The teacher helps student understand why even the apparently offensive wars of the Prophet (s.a.w.) were but defensive. It is to be born in mind that offensive wars are imposed on the targeted people without any provocations whatsoever, whereas the Prophet (s.a.w.) undertook military expeditions to Khaybar, Ḥunayn, and Tabūk because the targeted people planned and conspired against the Islamic state.

3-Drawing Attention of the Learners to the Basic Objectives of Battles: All the Prophets of Allah, including the First and the Last had been raised to ensure prevalence of justice and equity in human life. The Qur'an declares: “Certainly, We sent Our Apostles with clear proofs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that the humanity may experience equity and justice” (57:25). It is justice and justice alone which leads to peace at both individual and social levels. Battles of the Prophet (s.a.w.) were part of his mission to establish justice on the surface of the earth. One may wonder as to how the war could be considered a

means of ensuring justice. Its logical answer is that justice remains elusive as long as injustice remains in place. So, the people causing injustice are culprits who must be eliminated from the society. In the seerah courses teaching it is asserted that Quraysh, Arab tribes, Byzantine Empire, and Jews of Madinah and Khaybar sided with injustice, but the Prophet (s.a.w.) with justice.

4-Instilling into the Students the Idea of Comprehensive Personality of the Prophet (s.a.w.): The Prophet's personality has been misconceived even by Muslims. To them, the Prophet was an excellent spiritual guide and exemplary religious reformer. That is also the problem with non-Muslims. They hardly identify any link between the Prophet as spiritual guide and political leader, between him as religious reformer and commander in battlefields. The Qur'an made it obligatory for the Prophet (s.a.w.) to crush the mischief on the earth: "And fight with them until there is no persecution, and total submission (al-din) is made only to Allah" (8:39). In the seerah course imparting the teacher/instructor explains to the classes that the Prophet (s.a.w.) addressed all dimensions of individual and social life, familial, social, political, economic, cultural, educational, intellectual, and religious. The teacher focuses on the fact that if the Prophet was merely a religious leader, it would mean that his mission was confined to mosque. By sketching the comprehensive image of the Prophet (s.a.w.) as individual, as friend, as husband, as parent, as neighbor, as teacher, as judge, as arbiter, as head of state, as military commander, as religious guide the teacher inculcates students of seerah curriculum with the true and comprehensive image of the Prophet (S.A.W.).

5-Introducing to Students that Wars Depict the Prophet as Perfect Decision Maker: Wars of the Prophet (S.A.W.) involved the processes of counselling, logical reasoning, and crisis management. He always consulted his Companions in matters of military expeditions. These consultations involved even expression of different ideas. Badr, Uḥud, Aḥzāb etc. serve spectacular examples of such processes. For example, before the battle of Uḥud the Prophet (S.A.W.) preferred to remain in Madinah and defend the city from inside the city. But the young Muslims who missed their chance of participation in the first major battle, Badr appealed to the Prophet (S.A.W.) to face the enemy outside the city. The teacher of seerah introduces to the students how the Prophet (S.A.W.) made decisions as per the situation.

6-Identifying for and Explaining to Students the Post War Strategies of the Prophet (S.A.W.): Battles stories of the Prophet (S.A.W.) do not end with the information about fighting and bloodshed, these go beyond these anecdotes and include post war strategies of the Prophet (S.A.W.). In the battle of Badr around 70 enemies were captured. The Prophet (S.A.W.) exhorted his companions to treat the prisoners of war excellently. Consequently, the companions entertained their respective captive guests with the most appropriate dishes in dinner, whereas they

themselves remained confined to date fruits and water. The teacher of seerah courses is required to identify such stories and explain to their students the clemency of the Last Prophet (S.A.W.).

NATURE OF THE BATTLES DURING THE PROPHET'S TIME

This is a well-known historical fact that the last Prophet (S.A.W.) started preaching of the message of Allah in Makkah and spent thirteen years there with apparently little success. The followers of Islam were threatened, beaten, oppressed and killed. This crucial time period includes three years of the most horrible confinement and total socio-economic boycott of his clan, Bani Hashim. (Al- Wāqidī, 1409AH/1989) When the situation became unbearable, the Prophet (S.A.W.) advised several Muslim families to migrate to Abyssinia to be safe from brutality of Arab pagans. (Al-Haythami, 1421AH/2001)

After 13 years of Apostleship the Prophet (s.a.w.) and his followers migrated to Yathrib in order to escape the sufferings at the hands of Quraysh. This is strange and unfair that a person who spends his thirteen years with patience and forbearance is blamed for violence when he started his defense. This is also to be kept in mind that this view point is not correct that Muslims were so powerless and weak that they could not counter the infidels in Makkah. The Messenger of Allah deliberately opted patience and forbearance. Otherwise if he could combat the enemy at Badr with only 313 soldiers, mostly unarmed, he could have led a gorilla war in Makakh. But he did not do that only because his mission was to save the humanity from war and bloodshed. The Prophet (S.A.W.) fought wars after settling in Madinah only when the Islamic state he established was invaded by enemies with an intention to eliminate it. Had he not fought wars imposed on him by Quraysh and Arabs his mission to establish justice and peace on the earth would have remained incomplete.

BADR

This battle was fought in the year of 2 AH. The analytical and thorough study of history reveals that Quraysh decided unanimously to wipe out the Muslims by imposing a destructive war upon them. They prepared an army of 1300 soldiers to march towards Madinah to teach the Prophet (S.A.W.) and his companions lesson. The Prophet (S.A.W) left Madina when he heard the news that idolaters of Makkah started journey to attack Madina. When the Muslim troops reached Badr, Quraysh were already there and had encamped at the most suitable place. If the Prophet (S.A.W.) was initiator of war, why were the Makkan troops over there? Who was then the offender, the Prophet or the Quraysh? The number of Muslim soldiers was only three hundred. Could the small army of the Prophet be expected to wage a war against a big army? The Prophet did his best to minimize the losses in the battle at both sides. Only 70 enemies were killed and only 14 Muslims were martyred. It was the best military strategy of the Prophet (S.A.W.) that the

enemies were defeated, and their 70 soldiers were made captives. The Prophet (S.A.W.) commanded his companions to treat the captives in the best way possible. Consequently, Muslim soldiers served proper dishes to the captives and they themselves remained satisfied with date fruits and water. Later most of the prisoners of war were released upon ransom payment. Surprisingly, those who were unable to make the ransom payment were also released, but on the condition that each of them would teach ten Muslim children the art of reading and writing Arabic language. The story of Battle of Badr consists of five dimensions. First, the Prophet fought the enemies to protect the Islamic state. Second, the Prophet's war was defensive, not offensive. Third, the loss of life was minimum. Fourth, prisoners of war were treated excellently. Fifth, the POWS were released in the most respectable way. (Ibn Hisham, 1375AH/1955)

UḤUD

The defeat of Badr put the pagans on fire. This was the total humiliation which forced the Abu Sufyan, the leader of Quraysh to pronounce that he would not comb his hairs nor copulate with his spouse until the revenge was taken. All Quraysh families were naturally to feel fretted and fumed over the unexpected and disgraceful defeat at Badr. They managed to raise an army of 3000 soldiers and marched towards Madinah in 3 A. H. with the determination to eradicate Islam and Muslims. With all enthusiasm the Makkan army quickly reached in the suburbs of Madinah and encamped near the Uḥud Mountain. When the Prophet (S.A.W.) got the news of Quraysh army's movement, he also prepared an army of 700 soldiers to meet the enemy. His intention was only to defend the Islamic state. The Quraysh were invaders and the Prophet (S.A.W.) and his army were defenders. Even though the loss in this battle at the Muslim side was heavy, the bravery Muslim soldiers including the Muslim women who were there only as nurses showed in defending the Prophet (S.A.W.) was unprecedented.

AḤZĀB

After the bitter experience in the battle of Uḥud Quraysh made up their mind to seek the help of other Arab tribes including Ghaṭfān and thus prepare a huge army to invade Madinah. An allied force of 10,000-12,000 under the leadership of Abu Sufyān marched towards Madinah with an intention to enter the city of Madinah and wreak havoc on it. The Jews also conspired against the Prophet (S.A.W.). The Prophet (S.A.W.) was well informed about this planned attack by Quraysh from all sides of Madinah. The situation was very serious as the Jewish settlement of Banū Qurayzah breached the agreement they had signed with the Prophet (S.A.W.). Salman Fārsi, who was experienced in war fare, suggested to dig a wide defensive trench on the northern side. The Prophet (S.A.W.) appreciated the idea and a long, deep and wide ditch was dug up in twenty days. The history reveals that the Muslims dug this trench in very difficult circumstances. They had to work

with hunger and in cold weather. This battle is the best example of defense with minimum human and other resources. There is nothing in the story of battle for a student to be violent or aggressive.

These three battles can be taken as model for all battles of the Prophet (S.A.W.). (Al-Tabari, 1387 AH)

Objectives of battles

When we study the life history of Muhammad (S.A.W.) properly, we find that each and every war was fought for a genuine purpose. The Prophet (S.A.W) was not an invader or expansion seeker. The objectives of wars and military expeditions under the leadership of the Prophet (S.A.W.) could be enumerated as follows:

- 1) All the battles including Badr, Uḥud, and Aḥzāb were in defense of the Islamic state.
- 2) Conquest of Makkah was accomplished after the Quraysh breached the contract they signed with the Prophet (S.A.W.). It was mainly to help the non-Muslim Arab tribe, Banū Khuzā'ah against Makkah ally, Banū Bakr.
- 3) Battle of Hunayn was fought against Banū Hawāzin and Banū Thaqīf to defend Makkah which had become part of Islamic state.
- 4) Khaybar siege was to punish the Jews who had instigated Quraysh and Arab tribes to attack Madīnah.
- 5) Military expedition to Tabuk was to nip in the bud the Roman threat to invade Madīnah.

Principles of battles

The wars fought during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W.) either directly under his command or under the command of any of his Companions were based on some rules and regulations. The books of Seerah and hadith have recorded the following ethical rules that were commanded by the last Prophet (S.A.W.) to his army men. The most significant of those rules and principles are given here below:

1. Warriors were forbidden to ruin and destroy possessions and lands of the conquered.
2. They were exhorted not to mutilate dead bodies of enemies.
3. They were instructed not to set crops and houses of enemies on fire.
4. They were barred from harming children, women and elderly people at the side of the enemies.
5. They were advised to accept enemy offer and request for peace in the battle.
6. They were prevented from looting and plundering civilians' properties.

7. They were allowed to keep their old promises made with the enemies.
8. They were commanded to show sympathy and do excellent treatment to prisoners of war.

Overall prophetic teachings

Peace is the blessing of Allah almighty as the Quran demonstrates. In different Quranic verses, peace has been described as grace of Allah almighty. The Quran exemplifies that there was a village enjoying peace and happiness but its dwellers denied the blessings of Allah, resultantly they were punished by taking away peace and imposing fear upon them (28:57). It means war and fighting in the Quranic teachings is contrary to blessing of Allah. The Quran advises to Muslims to be so much powerful with armaments so that no invader would be able impose war upon you (8:60). The Prophets guided his companions to never wish and pray for a fight with enemy. He also directed them to avoid war if the enemy is ready for any agreement. He himself even allowed Thaqīf on his demand to not support him in any war. He also advised his companions to be ethical with enemy hence he prohibited to prevent water from enemies in war. His title Rahmat lil'alamin and the name of his religion Islam depict peacefulness.

CONCLUSION

The storytelling plays vital role in the learning process as research in the fields of linguistics, psychology and education proves. The stories of the Prophet are need of the day to be told and incorporated in curriculum in different dimensions to teach the students morality and ethical values. No one has become a terrorist after studying these stories. The stories of heroes are exemplifying bravery and courage and impart knowledge of history to students. The positive minds never learn negative things from good stories.

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