

Cultural Impacts of Virtual System on the Behavior of Religious Studies Students

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Abstract

One thing we learn from Quran is that every prophet came with miracle similar to the tricks famous for the period of time or the region. For example in the time of the Pharaoh, he used to stupefy and manipulate people by use of magicians and their magic: Thus he stupefied his people, and they obeyed him, they were wicked (sinning) people.² When Hz Musa came with his staff and dropped it, it turned to a snake and swallowed their magic. With a naked eye both sides did the same thing, hence they called Hz Musa a knowledgeable magician or another example, when in Arabia poetry was very popular, prophet Muhammad (pbuh) introduced Quran and no one could produce anything similar or close to it even one chapter (surah). We can go further and analyze story of Hz Yusuf, Hz Isa, Hz Saleh etc. What kind of lesson we learn from these stories? Every prophet came with a weapon similar what falsehood had for the specific region. Evil was fought back with the same “type” of weapon but with one difference, weapons of the prophets were from Allah (swt) and was representing, delivering the truth.

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2. Zukhruf, 54.

We are living in a strange era now, full of false information, data, different theories and philosophies, And to push through this false representatives of evils uses internet, media and social media. Almost everyone has mobile phone nowadays and using them for social media. From time to time they notice some videos or information which is introduced by falsehood to move them out of Islam. Weak (in terms of knowledge and faith) people (most of people) fall into their trap very easily. In one word we seem losing the game. What to do to change the situation:

1. Everyone (absolutely everyone) should bear the responsibility to improve his knowledge on the religion.
2. Those who has sufficient knowledge should use every possible ways and especially social media to share their knowledge and deliver the truth.

We should start from ourselves first! We need to get proper education, apply it to our life and then share it with others. Not all the cities has proper Islamic education centers and sometimes there are some barriers which stop us. For example location difference (I live in Baku but Islamic University is in Iran, Qom) and language difference (I speak Azeri, Russian, Turkish and English but don't speak Farsi or Arabic). In the era of internet, there are virtual study systems which remove location barrier and as those studies are held in different languages it removes language barrier as well. At the moment I study in Al-Mustafa University virtually and in Azeri language.

I think everyone who wants to contribute in improvement of Islam in the country should take this opportunity. After we have sufficient knowledge, we should use the same “weapon” as falsehood does (social media) to spread the truth. Here we need to consider lots of things, we need to produce the products accepted by people without resistance, know what they like. For example most of videos viewed the most are within 3 to 5 minutes, use some good background vocal melody, HD recording, cartoon type recording etc. There are some very good channels which I follow (for example “Islamic Pulse”) which does all these stuff in professional manner. As a summary, we need to use the same “weapon” in the same manner to deliver truth against the falsehood. All the praises are due to Allah (swt), due to His will all the good deeds start and finish successfully.

Key Words: Cultural Impacts, Virtual System, Behavior of Religious Studies Students

Introduction

To start with, I have to admit that I am very excited by writing the article on impact of virtual education on behavior of religious studies student as I am one of them. So basically it will be mostly about impact of virtual religious study on my behavior, but not limited to, as I will do my best to share my observations and opinion for people surrounding me and how virtual education could have impacted their behavior as well.

Prior to go into depth of the subject we need to review and comprehend each word and expression of the subject. Meanwhile we need to also classify some of them in order to understand their limits and borders in terms of what is the reality and how good looks like.

So we start with “Culture” and in order to understand what it (really) means we need to give it a definition. Word Culture is noun and it is defined in the dictionary as “the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society”.

So culture contains ideas, customs and behavior, it might not be limited to, however we will concentrate on them as they perfectly suits our subject.

Explaining “Social Behavior”

We will start our analysis from social behavior as this is sourced from customs and ideas, But before we move to social behavior we need to understand what is behavior for one and then how it becomes social.

So we need to define behavior first. Dictionary defines it as “the way in which one acts or conducts himself/herself, especially towards others”.

Explaining “Towards Others”

As the definition contains “towards others” it is clear that behavior is social act and person's behavior impacts others in one way or another.

Those acts might be positive and negative (in terms of social criteria and religious perspectives) and depending on that the person will get social value. So, once we are clear with social behavior, it is time to understand what is its relationship with customs and ideas.

Explaining “Custom” and “Idea”

We will review customs first. So again we will have to look to the definition of “custom” and it is defined in dictionary as “a traditional and widely accepted way of behaving or doing something that is specific to a particular society, place, or time”.

As it is clear from the definition, even though it is “widely accepted” it is restricted to the society, place and time, which means that any particular custom will be accepted in specific society, place or time.

So whatever is accepted in China is not necessarily accepted in Russia or vice versa or that was accepted 500 years ago might not be accepted now.

Now we look at “idea” and it is defined as “a thought or suggestion as to a possible course of action”.

Basically idea is a cause of action (so the action is an effect of the idea). It is not material and appears in terms of thought, opinion or suggestion. So this is important that we understand what is generating idea and custom. Idea is something personal when custom is social.

So a person will try to come with an idea and act within limits of custom in order to fit within the society (to be accepted by the society) and behave as “normal” (no one wants to seem as abnormal).

This is the case when an individual becomes victim of the society, so that society and social values acts as a generator of his idea and behavior. Every action of the person will be measured against the values adopted by the society and define how he/she behaves in the society.

If it is a good society and person misbehaves, society will identify and correct the person (court, prison, psychiatric hospital, education etc.), But what to do if the society is corrupted or brainwashed and can not realize what is good or bad.

We will look at both cases (with scenarios) soon and will try to examine them in details and understand the consequences.

What Forms “Idea” and “Custom”

As the idea is personal it will take its roots from something personal, for example knowledge, belief or experience. As the custom is social it will depend on social values, historical traditions or religion. Even though person is an individual within the society (part of the society), his/her idea may differ from customs (positively or negatively).

This will happen due to difference between what person believe is right and what society does. In history we have seen lots of examples when a person opposed against the society and customs and some of them were prosecuted or even executed by people, church or court.

As an examples on this case we can see Hz Nuh, Hz Ibrahim, Hz Zakariyya, Hz Yahya, Hz Ali, Hz Huseyn (including other 8 imams from his progeny), from European scientist we can see Socrate, Kopernik, Galileo etc, But it does not necessarily mean that individual is always right, not at all, this can be wise versa and we can see some examples as well.

For this scenario we can see Qarun (from ummah of Hz Musa), Qabil (son of Hz Adam), Iblis (among all at the throne of Allah) etc.

So, we have already reviewed what is culture and his components like idea, custom and social behavior. Based on the topic we need to review what kind of impact virtual system will have on behavior of religious student.

As the culture already contains social behavior, we have to define status of the society in terms of their knowledge and belief, we just have to (full stop).

Why is this Important?

It is important because we have to know the environment we are part of, what is good and what is bad in the society and what is “accepted culture” in the society. Only then we will be able to define where we were before religious study and where we are or will be as a religious student/graduate.

So, time to review some realities around us... From now on I will describe my thoughts and behavior before study and after I started my study in Al-Mustafa University.

First of all I will tell you how I was behaving and what kind of approach I had towards other people. I was born in a Muslim country and everyone used to call themselves Shia of Ali. I was following the society and accepted this as a normal thing. I never questioned anything and accepted everything as part of ultimate truth. Later I started reading and understood that whatever I witnessed around me is not representing Islam, Of course this heavily affected my behavior towards the society.

As I am religious (I have belief in Allah (swt) and practice Islam) independently from me I was judging people based on their belief and religious practice. Regular reading of Quran was giving me idea about human being and society. A

s I live in the country which is deemed to be a Muslim country, I was expecting all of the people to practice Islam completely but not seeing this in practice made me think of the verse 16 in chapter Al-Hadid:

«وكثير منهم فاسقون».

and many of them are sinners.¹

Fasiqoon means people who perform act of sin by not obeying to Allah (swt).

How I was observing (I do it now as well) it in the society – people call themselves Muslim but they do not pray salah, they do not fast, they do not give zakat, they consume alcohol, they make wedding party with alcohol, they consume substances made haram in Islam, they are involved in adultery (zina), they gamble, they offend people who really practice Islam and try to be a real follower of the Prophet (pbuh), imam Ali ibn Abu Talib and other imams of Ahlul-Bayt, they go to a tree and beg tree for recovery from illness ask for a child or wealth etc, But yet they call themselves Muslim and Shia of Ali... Very disappointing and to be honest disgusting... I was hating them because of the lie they say and practice.

This hatred increased significantly when I realized that I spent 35 years of my life in the environment where a little was from Islam but lots of things were from bid'ah (innovation in religion) and shirk (associating a partner with Allah (swt)).

So my behavior towards the society was in prosecuting mode and it was guilty in my mind.

1. Hadid, 4.

Where did this Culture and Social Behavior Come from and How Can be Preserved?

Time to go deeper to understand how deep a rabbit hole is...

As you may already know that Azerbaijan was part of Soviet Union and ideology of the entire country was Communism/Socialism which is based on materialism philosophy. Government of any time was fighting against religion openly and closely.

What they were trying to do was to turn pure religion in to shirk and practice jahiliyyah (root of jahiliyyah is jahala, which means to be ignorant or stupid, to act stupidly).

Why were they Trying to do so? Why Someone Wants to Stupefy the Society? What is the Aim on that Act?

We will review this point in Quran. It is clear that the Soviet Union was not the state of Islam rather it was state of Taghut. They made halal things of Allah (swt) haram and haram things halal.

In order to keep people under its control system tried to separate them from Islam and Allah (swt). We can see from history how Pharaoh acted similarly. As we know in the time of Yusuf (pbuh) people of Egypt and pharaoh of that time became muslims.

We know from history that there was a ruler change and one dynasty was replaced by another and the Pharaoh made people obey himself.

How Pharaoh Managed to Oppress Them?

The answer is in Quran:

«إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضِعُّ طَائِفَةً مِنْهُمْ يُذَبِّحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ».

Pharaoh exalted himself in the land, and divided its people into factions. He persecuted a group of them (Bani Isra'il), slaughtering their sons, while sparing their daughters. He was truly a corrupter.¹

He singled out Bani Isra'il within Egypt, But how he managed oppress other people? In Quran Allah (swt) talks about Pharaoh and how he gained control over people:

«فَاسْتَحَفَّتْ قَوْمَهُ فَاطَاعُوهُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ».

Thus he stupefied his people, and they obeyed him, they were wicked (sinning) people.²

How Could he Manage to Stupefy Them?

The answer is in Quran again. When Hz Musa and Harun (pbut) came to Pharaoh and called him upon releasing Bani Isra'il, which was under his oppression. Hz Musa had his staff as a miracle, he dropped it and it became a real snake:

«فَالْقَىٰ عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ».

So he threw his rod, then lo! it was a clear serpent.¹

1. Qasas, 4.

2. Zukhruf, 54.

People close to Pharaoh advised him following:

«قَالُوا أَرْجِهْ وَأَخَاهُ وَأَرْسِلْ فِي الْمَدَائِنِ حَاشِرِينَ * يَأْتُوكَ بِكُلِّ سَاحِرٍ عَلِيمٍ».

They said, “Put him off, and his brother, and send heralds to the cities. And let them bring you every skillful magician.”¹

At that time magic and sehr was very popular, specialized scholars in magic (Professional magicians) were very popular and people liked them, But how this fact was used by Pharaoh to stupefy people.

We need to review more verses from Quran:

«فَالْقُوا حِبَالَهُمْ وَعَصِيَّتُهُمْ وَقَالُوا بِعِزَّةِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْغَالِبُونَ».

So they threw their ropes and their sticks, and said By the majesty of Pharaoh, we will be the winners.²

Then they made a magic:

«قَالَ أَلْقُوا فَلَمَّا أَلْقَوْا سَحَرُوا أَعْيُنَ النَّاسِ وَاسْتَزْهَبُوهُمْ وَجَاءُوا بِسِحْرِ عَظِيمٍ».

He said, “You throw!” And when they threw, they beguiled the eyes of the people, and intimidated them, and produced a mighty magic.³

As a result people saw a magic (not miracle) heppening du to “Phraoh’s majesty”. This was not the first ime as magic was very popular and Pharaoh used this for his credit, Of couse not educated people would accept it as a will of Pharaoh.

1. Araf, 111-112.

2. Shu’ara, 44.

³. Araf, 116.

This gave extra arrogance (kibr) to Pharaoh and he ended up saying:

«فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى».

He said, “I am your Lord, the most high”.¹
and claimed to be God.

How This Story is Relevant to Socialistic Government?

With the improvement of science they tried hard to disprove existence of God and make people to “wow” with results of scientific results. In order to make people obey they used very similar approach as Pharaoh did.

After getting independence from Soviet Union and getting relationship with Islamic Republic of Iran and Islamic scholars we got chance to receive religious literature and very small amount of people fulfilled the very first order of Allah (swt) which is:

«إِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ».

Read in the Name of your Lord who created.²

People were kept away from reading Quran, they were given different other books instead (like Capital of Marks, Communism of Lenin, from Engels, it or Hugo etc.), learning Russian language was more fashionable than study Arabic language.

Basically as it is described in Quran:

«وَقَالَ الرَّسُولُ يَا رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُورًا».

And the Messenger will say, My Lord, my people have abandoned this Quran.³

¹. Nazi'at, 24.

². Alaq, 1.

³. Furqan, 30.

As we know reading Quran is remembering Allah (swt) and abandonment of it will end up in forgetting of Allah (swt).

Allah (swt) warns us not to forget Him in Quran:

«وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ».

And do not be like those who forgot God, so He made them forget themselves. These are the sinners.¹

So, to control those who forget Allah (swt) and sin very easy, as they forget themselves (humanity and the reason for them to be here). When people are to be servants of Allah (swt) they become slave of Taghut, And in this case Islam becomes way how to burry body (hence it was popular like deen for dead people).

The Way is Gone

Once upon a time (about 2 years ago) Allah (swt) awoke me up and I realized that I did not know anything about Islam (till that time I was Ahlu Sunnah vel Camaah) and I started reading and researching about Islam and historical events. Initially I was reading Quran (translation, as I did not know Arabic yet) and Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Al-Muslim.

While reading and researching lots of questions arose in my head and I was looking for answers. Later I got electronic version of Kutubi Sittah (six books of hadees collection from Bukhar, Muslim, Abu Dawood, Tirmithi, Nasai and bin Majah) and continued my research in virtual system.

1. Hashr, 19.

I managed to find almost all hadis which Shia scholars were referring to in their books and got more clear vision in what happened after death of Prophet (pbuh) and how ummah dealt with his family and progeny. I read aqaid from Jafar Sobhani and understood what is real belief of Shia.

Meanwhile I was reading other books from Imam Sajjad, Ayatollah Xomeyni, Dastghayib, Murtuza Mutahhari etc.

The more I read the more it was clear to me how the society went astray and it was very painful for me to see people calling themselves Muslim but acting like people of jahiliyyah time.

As I already mentioned they were in sin, haram and were insisting in being Shia of Ali. I could not bear this and was thinking of people like they are kuffar (disbeliever), I was treating them as animals (even worse).

Gradually I realized that I was isolated from society. I did not want to have anything common with people who insist on being muslim but not practicing it. Particular role was played by several of my friends who were very aggressive towards people as well. Basically I was under influence of those people. Even though I was wondering if I was doing right things.

In December of 2016 I made a tour to Iran, I visited holy city of Qom and Mashhad. In this trip Allah (swt) granted me with a scholarship in JamiatulMustafa.

So I started my education through virtual systems, receiving electronic books and lectures.

I am also using other electronic sources to make some research for my essays. One of the subjects was Ethics and Morale in Islam, so I had to write some essay.

Surely what was provided by the university was enough to write it, however I did some more research. I listened to several more lectures on the subject, referred to some more books (from Kamal Haydari, Xomeyni, Mutahhari etc.).

This helped me to understand the subject more and come up with more quality essay.

Religious Impacts on People's Behavior

Another subject was Perfect Man (from Murtaza Mutahhari) where I had unique chance to see character of a perfect man in sample of Prophet (pbuh) and Ali Ibn Abu Talib, understand in what kind of environment they lived and made tabligh and fought not just against pagans also against ignorance of people, who preferred to stick to the way as their fathers did and did not want to accept the truth.

This is educational part, now let's see how it affected my behavior. I have already described how I used to behave towards people without faith or fasiqoon (sinners).

I could not bear them and tried to avoid them. Later by continuing my education and research on life of Prophet (pbuh) and Ahlul Bayt (as) I gained more information (which was totally new to me) and knowledge on philosophy of their arrival upon humanity and how they behaved within man kind.

In my opinion life of Prophet (sawas) and AhlulBayt (as) were not examined in details by me, where lots of lessons could have been derived from and referred to. Firstly what I learnt:

1. Man kind was looking for Allah (swt) but was misguided by Iblis and shayateen
2. Allah (swt) sends his messengers with the message of Tawheed
3. Messenger propagates tawheed by demonstrating a unique knowledge and akhlag (behavior)
4. Ahlul-Bayt (as) continued mission of the Prophet (sawas) with knowledge and akhlag (behavior)
5. Neither Prophet (sawas) nor Ahlul-Bayt (as) never acted in the behavior to repel anyone.

Conclusion

Allah (swt) wants every soul to be saved from hell fire- hence the messengers:

1. Good akhlag to be exercised to succeed in tableegh
- Proof of Allah's willing to save people from hell fire is:

Number of sent prophets is 124.000 based on famous hadeeth.

Prophets were sent to different tribes (Ad, Samood, Madyan, Ayka etc.)

Here is the proof of requirement for a good akhlag to succeed in da'wah:

- Allah (swt) talks to prophet (sawas) and says:

«وَأَنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ»

And you are of a great moral character.¹

- Allah (swt) describes importance of good akhlag in next verse:

«فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانْفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ».

It is by of grace from God that you were gentle with them.

Had you been harsh, hardhearted, they would have dispersed from around you.²

2. We all need to tune ourselves to Prophet (sawas).

- Allaha (swt) gives us a hint:

«لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا».

You have an excellent example in the Messenger of God;
for anyone who seeks God and the Last Day, and
remembers God frequently.³

«لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيهِمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ».

There is an excellent example in them for you—for anyone
who seeks God and the Last Day, But whoever turns away—
God is the Self-Sufficient, the Most Praised.⁴

1. Qalam, 4.

2. Ali 'Imran, 159.

3. Ahzab, 21.

4. Mumtahanah, 6.

Especially after I have read “Target of the life” from Murtaza Mutahhari, I understood the general purpose of the life and how my role should be in.

Generally the life is a battle of Haqq and Bateel between friends of Allah (swt) and friends of Iblis. Our target is to be servants of Allah (swt) rather than savants of Iblis. In this journey everyone shall ask themselves a question:

- What is my mission?

What can/ shall I do to please Allah (swt) more. Without education it is very hard to find correct answer to the question.

From what I have learnt using virtual education systems I need to follow footsteps of Prophet (sawas) and his Ahlul-Bayt. Actually being Shia means to follow footsteps. Allah (swt) mentions about being Shia in Quran:

«وَإِنَّ مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ لَإِبْرَاهِيمَ».

And, verily, among those who followed his [Nuh's (Noah)] way (Islamic Monotheism) was Ibrahim.¹

- How shall I follow them?

My answer to the question as below:

1. Tazkiyyah,
2. Purification of my nafs before I get elm for tableegh,
3. Elm,
4. Knowledge to understand Quran for tableegh,

1. Safat, 83.

5. Akhlag,
6. To succeed in tableegh,
7. Sabr,
8. Patience in getting elm and doing tableegh,
9. Tawfeeq,
10. Uccess from Allah (swt) in achieving the target (tableegh). As you see from the list, tableegh is something common for all of them.

I have spent 10 years of my life to learn English, procedures and technical stuff to get a well paid job. Now it is time I spend resources granted by Allah (swt) to me to serve him and get his pleasure and blessings.

As you see from the essay, I changed from almost takfirist and become a useful person for the society. This happened because:

1. I started from tazkiyyah,
2. Started going knowledge how I could.
3. Allah (swt) granted me with Al-Mustafa university.
4. Teachers from the university contributed a lot in my behavioral change, But of course al is due to Allah's (swt) will.

References

- **Holy Quran.**