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Islamic Pedagogy and Embodiment: An Anthropological Study of a British Madrasah

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Islamic Pedagogy and Embodiment: An Anthropological Study of a British Madrasah

Abstract

This anthropological study, of a higher education British madrasah, is about increasing our awareness of the spectrum of sensory experiences that shape Islamic pedagogy. I started my anthropological study from an Islamic premise of the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred. Pedagogy is defined as not a matter of simple methods and technique but as an holistic approach that deals with the capacity to form the human person. Islamic pedagogy is represented by the heartfelt interactions between the teacher and learner through orality, facilitating memorisation, and the didactic approach towards sacred texts. This research has endeavored to explore the sensoria of the British madrasah from a mystical approach and this provides the foundation for shaping our understanding of the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy. Al-Ghazali's mystical approach toward learning is evident in this research in defining the madrasah as a spiritual rather than social construct, and is optimised by the embodiment of learning.

Keywords

Islam, pedagogy, knowledge, spirituality, orality, memorisation, Quran, embodiment.

Islamic Pedagogy and Embodiment: An Anthropological Study of a British Madrasah

Introduction

I started my anthropological study from an Islamic premise of the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred. Pedagogy is defined, similar to Paulo Freire (2001), as not a matter of simple methods and technique but as an holistic approach that deals with the capacity to form the human person. More specifically the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy is defined as the strategies employed by the teacher to spiritually form the human person. This is supported by Al-Ghazali's mystical approach toward learning in his conception of the linkage between the heart and the human being (Al-Ghazali, 1853; Gunther, 2007). For Al-Ghazali, the heart is a transcendental spiritual subtlety and this is the essence of being human, which comprehends, learns, and knows (Al-Ghazali, 1853; Gunther, 2007). Islamic pedagogy is represented by the heartfelt interactions between the teacher and learner through orality, facilitating memorisation, and the didactic approach towards sacred texts (Sabki and Hardaker, 2012).

I mean to infer from the sensoria of the fieldwork a madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy. This also suggests something void in current Islamic education research and the notion of 'coming to our senses' when we deploy our reflexively in engaging in the world. In particular, I sensed how Islamic pedagogy was not being presented from the prism of a traditional madrasah. This research has endeavored to explore the sensoria of the madrasah from a mystical approach and this provides the foundation for shaping our understanding of the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy. Al-Ghazali's mystical approach toward learning is evident in this research in defining

the madrasah as a spiritual rather than social construct, and is optimised by the embodiment of learning. (Gunther, 2007).

Higher education madrasahs of excellence, that still remain, impart an ambience rooted in scholastic and spirituality development (Nadwi, 2007). Typically a traditionalist madrasah curriculum is conventionally focused and is naturally open to diverse influences that also represents a traditional Islamic way (Nadwi, 2007). For example many madrasah teachers are versed in Islamic pedagogy but also in modern University pedagogic developments such as behaviorist, cognitivist and the more recent constructivist styles. This anthropological study, of a British madrasah, represents such an institution that is grounded in traditional madrasah education but for example continues to adopt ancillary subjects. My sensory narrative is partly about the development of a different way to think and talk about the madrasah, a mystical approach; a mode of attention through which we increase our awareness of the spectrum of sensory experiences that shape Islamic pedagogy.

Data Source: The British Madrasah

This study is based on a British madrasah and I will refer to this madrasah for the purpose of the paper, due to privacy, as ‘The British Madrasah’. My anthropological study was conducted between 2007-2010 at a prominent madrasah in the north of England. ‘The British Madrasah’ symbolises another development in the Tarim, Hadramawt, diaspora but with a focus on the West rather than the early trade routes of the East. The madrasah, as an educational institution, has sustained the historical significance of Tarim, Hadramawt, that has taken Islam to many parts of

the world. For example, Tarim is known for its role in taking Islam to South East Asia and China representing the Yemeni trade routes. For my anthropological study the notion of Islamic teaching and embodiment was clear in the teaching but more profoundly in the line of transmission and the tradition of Tarim, Hadramawt. The caliph Abu Bakr (prophet Muhammad's close companion) made three supplications for Tarim including: that God blesses its water, God fortifies its land and God makes its scholars spring forth like shoots from the ground. Thousands of scholars have emerged from Tarim, and the surrounding area of Hadramawt, over the last 1400 years. There was a new wave of Western scholars who moved to Tarim in the mid 1990's to study the religious sciences in a Sufi¹ Madrasah that maintains a traditionalist path in the teachings of Islam. From this small group of Islamic scholars, who moved to Tarim, two returned to the United Kingdom and formed madrasahs in the north and south of England. When I started the anthropological fieldwork I had limited knowledge of the teachers or the influence of Tarim, Hadramawt. Identifying and providing an insight into the Tarim tradition reveals an underlying influence of the Tarim diaspora that shapes this narrative on sensory orders, embodiment, identity, and spirituality in our madrasah understanding of Islamic pedagogy.

So my descriptions from the anthropological study is manifested by my personal experiences over three years conducting participant observation with supporting interviews. This study, is based on a qualitative methodology, and is influenced by Morse (1996) and (Kim, 1993). It is rooted in Islamic anthropology (Davies, 1988), and uses research methods derived from sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009). Two methods were used to collect data: observation (observer as

¹ *Sufism is generally understood as being the inner, mystical dimension of Islam (Keller, 1995). Classical Sufi scholars have defined Sufism as "science whose objective is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but God" (Zarruq, Istrabadi, Hanson, 2008)*

participant) and interview. Interview material was subjected to narrative analysis, using techniques suggested by Reissman (1993), in order that underlying themes can be identified. The collection of data took place whilst I was immersed in 'The British Madrasah'. In addition to the participant observation I also conducted in-depth interviews and this extended the fieldwork into areas that needed further investigation and clarification. Drawing on data from fieldwork in 'The British Madrasah', I suggest that the key to Islamic pedagogy is about enabling the embodiment of knowledge and this is seen to create an individualistic and personalized learning experience.

Analysing sensory ethnography materials involved engagement with existing methods of analysis and rethinking these methods in ways that are attentive to the senses (Pink, 2008).

Firstly, there is a need to develop an awareness of how different types of research materials might facilitate ways of being close to the non-verbal, tacit, emplaced knowledge that a sensory analysis seeks to identify (Pink, 2008). Secondly, it is crucial to recognise the constructedness of the modern western sensorium and the importance of understanding other people's world through their sensory categories (Geurts, 2002). Thirdly, a sensory analysis will usually begin from the assumption that people inhabit multisensory environments, places which themselves are constantly being remade. By understanding these issues, it helped in identifying the right mixed of qualitative methods.

In this study, the researcher was dealing with a belief in both knowledge and the sacred and this demands sensory categorisation that facilitates Islamic pedagogy and embodiment. These categories began to emerge through the researcher's culturally specific engagements as part of

the research process. For this research, I follow a sensory narrative style in expressing my descriptions. I observed early in the fieldwork that the five-sense sensorium is not universal across all cultures and did not meet the needs of my anthropological study. Geurts drew on a linguistics approach to construct what she calls a ‘kind of’ (provisional) inventory of sensory fields (Geurts, 2002) and this shaped my approach towards the sensorium. I have used four broad claims concerning sensory orders, embodiment, identity, and spirituality to structure my sensory ethnographic descriptions of Islamic pedagogy and embodiment. I support Geurts (2002) claim that physiological evidence suggests human bodies gain sensory information in a variety of ways. This leads to our propositions that the mainstream western model of five senses is a folk model (Geurts, 2002); and the madrasah model is different, and privileges orality(sound), kinesthesia and embodiment as central to the approach. The impact of this model (or approach) can be seen in four areas, each of which affect the others: the use of language to describe the sensorium; moral values embedded in teaching and learning; a madrasah model of embodiment; and ideas about knowledge and sacred. As the title of this paper suggests I now explore the four broad claims through a sensory narrative manifested from the anthropological study. The sensory narrative is interwoven with theoretical insights.

Islamic Pedagogy and Embodiment: A Sensory Narrative

My sensory narrative is partly about the development of a different way to think and talk about the madrasah, a mystical approach; a mode of attention through which we increase our awareness of the spectrum of sensory experiences that shape Islamic pedagogy, and become literally more conscious of our spiritual realm. Accordingly I was compelled to bring this

ambient background of the madrasah right to the foreground of my analysis. Of course, it need not be the case that isolated sensory experiences are always made the centre of analysis. The spacialisation and social formation of the madrasah opened my senses to the integral role of the madrasah towards shaping our heart² and how in turn this was shaped by the diaspora. This brings us back to the notion of ‘coming to our senses’ and the need to discuss Islamic pedagogy and how this is woven to the four broad claims concerning sensory orders, embodiment, identity, and spirituality. As alluded to earlier, the teachers pedagogical strategy facilitates the interplay between orality, memorisation and the sacred text in spiritually forming the human person. I now elaborate on the centrality of the madrasah as a spiritual construct by taking the ethnographic focus to the madrasah classroom, which introduces Islamic pedagogy to the reader by reflecting on the teaching and learning multisensory experience.

The Heart and Soul of Knowledge

So the first part of what coming to our senses, as stated previously, entails is developing the educational compass of sacred knowledge and this is sacred scriptures that are seen to compose of the literal, moral, and sapiential or spiritual dimensions (Sabki & Hardaker, 2012). As an ethnographer I followed many madrasah classes for three years and I was drawn to the openness and intimacy of the discussions, the issues and challenges of the memorisation, and how this seemed instrumental to the embodiment of knowledge. Prayer and recitation fostered the heartfelt connection with the madrasah and was integral to the spacialisation and social formation. For example the timetable of classes were scheduled around the prayer times and this

² *the heart is a transcendental spiritual subtlety and is the essence of being human (al-Ghazali, 1853).*

is a typical style of the traditional Islamic madrasah. I was discussing with a teacher who expounded that memorisation through repetition helps you to achieve greater awareness of your educational compass³. He expresses

“constant repetition is something become known and when you repeat something consciously it becomes something you can attached to and even if you don’t read it, it is there within you. Some people call this ‘scholars of the sole’ (spiritual master). The most widely accepted opinion by muslim ‘scholars of the sole’ is that action will go according to your senses or perception”.

Our theoretical perspective proposes the compass is rooted in knowledge and the sacred, which includes memorisation of sacred texts, similar to Helen N Boyle (2006), but also extends into Al-Ghazali’s perception of spiritual subtlety and Nasr’s (1979) conviction of the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred. I defined the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy as the strategies employed by the teacher in spiritually forming the human person (Sabki and Hardaker, 2012). In some respects the application of such strategies and representational practices have yielded accounts of experience that speak for themselves. However, ‘coming to our senses’ is not simply about finding the methods and techniques of Islamic pedagogy but also the spiritual experiences of the madrasah and the wider diaspora. All are inextricably bound together.

The production of multisensory forms of teaching and learning is not a sufficient end in itself. At its worst, the uncritical Islamic pedagogical practice of ‘the sensuous’ simply provides a validation of gut feelings for how Islamic education is; which leads me to explore further the first part of what ‘coming to our senses’ entails. That is, ‘coming to our senses’ necessitates subjecting non-conscious, mystical sensuous experiences to rigorous analysis through

³ Helen N Boyle’s (2006, 2007) research on the notion of the Qur’anic moral compass facilitated our own personal reflections on the compass that is integral to the Muslim daily prayer. For the purpose of our research the compass is defined in the context of knowledge and the sacred.

participation and observation. The metaphysical nature of the heart and soul and the connection that exists between the entities is illustrated by using the example of health of our body and how health is more about metaphysical rather than physical (Yates, 1966). In understanding the characterising features of Islamic pedagogy we see a need for the teacher to connect with the student in passing explicit knowledge but also to reach the subtle low entity of the metaphysical heart and soul. My fieldwork provided a clear lens on the mystical approach being adopted by the teachers in their application of Islamic pedagogy and this is pivotal to understanding the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy. This raises issues of belief but from an Islamic pedagogy perspective the unseen is innate to the teaching process. “Imam Abdul Hamid Al-Ghazali (1853) said

“when we speak about the heart, we are speaking about the subtle low entity that has the connection to the physical heart. So the connection which exist with the metaphysical heart and the heart and the metaphysical soul and the soul, is similar to the connection that exist between entities and the accidental qualities so such as the body and health. When health is more metaphysical than physical”.

The connection of the metaphysical heart of the teacher and student relates to the physical realm but also the ‘afterlife’ as discussed in “Ihya Ulum ad-Deen” by Al-Ghazali (1853). I struggled with the notion of the heart and the intangible sensoria that it seemed to represent. An interview with a teacher seemed to widen my senses by explaining

“if the soul overpowers the heart, the heart will become illuminated and become like a magnet to the soul. The heart itself has the authority and it is like the king that control the limbs and it asks them to do whatever it wants. The physical body that is passion and rage and if it takes power and control of the heart, then that will then cause the heart to talk to the limbs on how to behave and the limbs will then become observant and obedient to the heart which is obedient not the physical body”.

Through literally following both my own heart, as well of those of others, and interrogating what the heart discovered, my fieldwork experiences argue for the impossibility of talking about the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred. This is a heartfelt belief that underpins the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy. I felt this from the observations and supporting comments from a teacher who explains

“to take knowledge and action towards the path of God you will be helped in reaching the Haqiqah (reality), but knowledge without action is harmful. Take knowledge is to love God and this will help your connection with God... It is like a fruit tree and your actions being the fruits. Your hunger will disappear when you eat the fruits...”

Al-Ghazali’s mystical approach toward learning and his conception of the linkage between the heart and the physical human being (Al-Ghazali, 1853; Gunther, 2007) provides a path for understanding. For Al-Ghazali (1853) the heart is a transcendental spiritual subtlety and is the essence of being human.

Memorisation as the Path to Embodiment

Early one morning I entered a classroom where a female group of students were supporting each other on various subjects but for most this was the memorisation of Arabic vocabulary or supplications. The madrasah experiences, for most, represented lofty hopes and realities of both teachers and students. As the fieldwork evolved I could begin to see repetition in the constructs that represented the teaching approach. For example, the teacher tended to give examples of her own personal struggle and how we have the potential to reach the state of Imam Al-Ghazali. From ‘The British Madrasah’ observations, and supporting interviews, I observe that as the

persons memorisation practice increases we see improved abilities in the retention of knowledge.

A teacher talked about his personal childhood and teenage years. He mentioned

“when he was young he was memorising the Shafi Fiqh about ten lines and that would increase to sixty lines and it took him no time to do so. When he was a young adult he could look at a whole page of hadith and stand up and repeat everything. I was like a scanner”.

An expectation from the teacher to students is immersion in learning and for this to progress to a state of embodiment. Moving to an immersive learning experience that leads to embodiment is integral to Islamic education (Boyle, 2007). A teacher expressed his opinion that embodiment is missing in teaching in most Islamic institutions with a few exceptions such as Dar Al-Mustafa, Tarim. He continued by saying

“if the embodiment is not present then there is a clash of the two different method. The act of memorisation by way of repetition embeds the knowledge. Once that knowledge has become embedded then that person will be able to interact with that knowledge (embodiment).

By the end of the first year of my observations the students hopes for memorisation were becoming a reality. For example many had memorised the Al-Ghazali supplications to support daily practice. The teachings required the memorisation to be a path to embodiment but most students were struggling with embodying the knowledge, and taking this into actions of daily life. Here again I endeavored to push the anthropological perspective towards the fieldwork by endeavoring to also ‘live’ the observations. I memorised the supplications and took on the challenge of embodiment. The participation provided a sense of the interdependence of memorisation and embodiment for Islamic pedagogy. This raised issues of how memorisation as a pedagogical method ‘interplayed’ with the importance of ‘orality’ and the ‘text’. As I

mentioned a teacher expounded that memorisation through repetition helps you to achieve embodiment. He expresses

““with repeating something you become conscious and you can become attached and it is there within you. Actions will go with your senses or perception””.

My fieldwork began to show how the madrasah model towards Islamic pedagogy privileges orality(sound), kinesthesia and embodiment. We begin to see the importance of my sensory classification, that adopted the methods of Geurts (2002) inventory of sensory fields, in supporting the Islamic epistemological perspective (Davies, 1988).

Our theoretical perspective is supported by our fieldwork in illustrating how undertaking memorisation is pivotal to the overall learning process (Boyle, 2006). The practices of memorisation and recitation, question and response, are taught from the very early years of education and often before children are able to write. The Islamic education paradigm sees knowledge of the Qur’ān and its accurate memorisation as the first step in mastering the religious sciences (*'ilm*). Thus, educated Muslims consider all bodies of knowledge which elucidate the 'high words' (*klam 'alya*) of the Qur’ān and the traditions of prophet Muhammad to comprise the religious sciences (Eickelman, 1978). Knowledge is affected by its mode of transmission in supporting memorisation. The fieldwork highlighted the spiritual nature of what is taking place in the memorisation's process in the context of the internalization of knowledge through the oral transmission process.

I observed how memorisation as a pedagogy method supports the embodying of the revealed knowledge of the Qur'ān and the notion of the 'walking Qur'ān'. Hence, I use embodiment as a way of describing Qur'ānic memorisation in delineating the significance of the act of memorisation in a way that captures its meaning. By memorising the Qur'ān students endeavor to embody and retain prophecy that is unified to their existence and practice in being close to God. From my observation, the main consideration above is the notions of certainty and embodiment that leads to action. From an interview a teacher says

“I think embodiment as a teacher is the sincerity in your teaching because you get to a point where you too feel ashamed to teach unless you embody. Imam Al-Haddad says, One of the things that shyatan does is that he convinces the teacher that because you are not practicing, you shouldn't teach and it lead you to the point that there is so much embarrassment that you don't practice. The embodiment comes not just through knowledge but learning the true essence of knowledge. So when you speak there is always the underlying understanding that you are speaking first and for most that you are speaking to yourself”.

The intention was to interrogate the veracity of the rationales ascribed to memorisation of knowledge and it's embodiment, and to trace the social behaviour of these sensations. In doing so, the attention to memorisation of knowledge and it's embodiment yielded a particular portrait of madrasah space, ridden with invisible, yet clear realities. This was supported by a teacher with his comment

“when you attached to the true essence of knowledge, the knowledge penetrates you and they go from becoming words to realities”.

That is not to say, however that they are just realities in our own temporal space, simply that realities comprised of particular aromas, physical sensations but also extend into the unseen spiritual ambiances. This seemed to support teachers and students in their memorisation,

subsequent embodiment and enrich their insight into the process of memorisation. This brings us to the issue of realisation and embodiment and how this leads to action. A teacher explained

“Yes, it is all about realisation. When you teach, it is not actually teaching the words but it is about your sincerity and attachment to the words and that is how you affect the students. In the West they might call it passion but in Islam we call it sincerity. If you are sincere in teaching then you feel the sense of remorse and when you feel the sense of remorse then it should help and inspire you to practice what you teach and inspire you to embody”.

It is particularly this, the investment made by power in our bodies, through our senses, that leads me to emphasise the second part of what “coming to our senses” entails. Through interrogating the sensuousness of madrasah behaviour, it is possible to reveal our human potential and to see ways in which that potential can be nurtured. However, critically interrogating the madrasah experiences of the senses also alerts us to the inherent disconnection posed by our limited realisation to the spiritual realm of the world. A teacher explained

“embodiment comes in different ways and if you memorised one thing and embodied it fully this is better than memorising everything but not embodied anything. The Sahabah would not memorise more than ten ayah unless they embodied it. So when you heard that the Sahabah memorised the Qur’ān, there were only ten of them that memorised the Qur’ān and they fully embodied what they memorised”.

The second part of what “coming to our senses” is intended to elucidate is the dual process of the need to attune our thought to the spiritual needs of our body and bringing the physical sensuousness of the educational experience as one. In ‘The British Madrasah’ this was seen to have significant ramifications for the veracity of embodiment and our realisation of the divine teachings. For a start, facilitating the memorisation of knowledge, represented by its interactions with the orality of the teacher and the didactic approach towards sacred texts, appears significantly different

when we actually stop merely ‘looking’ at them, and instead, turn all of our senses towards them.

A teacher emphasised the importance of her consistency in daily repetition

“we begin to see the unveiling of secrets from the consistency of remembrance. When matters of concern are consistently mentioned or consistently done then we see the fruits of our actions”.

I discussed the Hadramis and how they left to propagate knowledge and how this is deep in their society. The Hadramis long history of going to other places to propagate knowledge provides an important insight on the emphasis they place on the embodiment of knowledge. A teacher stated *“with the exception of Yemen (Tarim), the embodiment in teaching is missing”.*

This statement is from a Hadrami who sees the struggle for embodiment in both teachers and students and at the same time he sees how ‘coming to our senses’ is about understanding reality that is taking prophetic teachings as part of our reality. ‘Coming to our senses’ then becomes about taking prophetic words into our actions and embodied in our reality. This leads us to the role of the linkages between memorisation in sustaining the authenticity of knowledge that is being preserved and applied to changing environments. Such preservation is primarily enabled through the oral transmission process embedded in Islamic pedagogy.

Transmission and Oral Expression

Moreover, each of these pedagogical concepts ‘looks’ different through each separate sense and as I mentioned Islamic pedagogy privileges orality(sound), kinesthesia and embodiment. This is illustrated through the traditions in the oral transmission of sacred texts such as the Qur’ān. For example a long chain of transmitters were authenticated before the final sacred text was

established (Sezgin, 1956). This also touches on the intrinsic nature of oral transmission and memorisation that emerged from the demands of the Arabic language, orality tradition, and empathy with a complex understanding of knowledge and the sacred (Denny, 1989). The oral dimension of the Qur'ān, combined with the traditional significance of memory in the transmission of knowledge, affects the whole of the Islamic intellectual tradition and pedagogical approach. The revelation of the Qur'ān was auditory, and memorised, before becoming crystallized in a written text (Schoeler, 2006). From my observations of 'The British Madrasah' the lines of transmission remain integral to the authenticity of knowledge, and when this has shaped the tribes and the lineage of scholars I can see the far-reaching supremacy.

Turning an ear towards the madrasah, the evolution of language, or modes of oral expression therein extended our account of social formation. This difference is not, however, because oral expressions or actions offers a different angle onto the world from, for example, the nose. But rather it is because they inscribe everyday experience with different material phenomenological qualities than the other senses. The point made by Georg Simmel (1971) asserts

“every sense delivers contributions characteristic of its individual nature to the construction of sociated existence.”

The third part of 'coming to our senses', is encapsulated amongst the many phenomenological qualities of sounds for example, especially the sounds such as those of the recitation of the Qur'ān whose vibrations are felt in the heart, and this was seen to be an ability to produce collective spiritual experiences that can cut through the physical realm. In contrast, vision, from my observations, can be credited as being the senses most likely to reify a sense of distinction

between teacher and learner making the lines between self and world visible and more tangible. I discussed smell that to a lesser extent in the madrasah is the sense that is credited with providing a sense of boundaries and also unity between the seen and the unseen, as well as the boundaries of the culture that lives through that body. Here we see how privileging of orality(sound), kinesthesia and embodiment holds with the sensoria that supports eternal truths.

This of course, is what makes them so integral to the formation of the characterising features of Islamic pedagogy (Sabki and Hardaker, 2012). From my observation of ‘The British Madrasah’, in certain conditions, it has made these privileged senses integral to the interplay between orality and its relationship with facilitating memorisation and didactic approach towards sacred texts.

Firstly, they are spiritually rooted in the notion of passing on knowledge and the teacher as a transmitter. Secondly, they are culturally rooted by the traditions of orality and stories being passed from one generation of people to the next and the need to maintain authenticity. The privileged senses are about supporting transmission, authenticity, quality of content, and maintaining an oral tradition. From my fieldwork I found this naturally leads to the embodiment of knowledge. The idea that the teacher is a student and the perception that the student will become a teacher is integral to maintaining the authentic lines of transmission and is animated as an expectation between the teacher and student. I found this notion of the teacher being a student was seen to be important and the influence of the teachers teacher I could see in the conversations.

To reiterate, I affirm that the characterising features of Islamic pedagogy are seen when we stop ‘looking’ at it because we then see how it turns all of our senses towards the teaching process and this is owed to the fact that it privileges orality(sound), kinesthesia and embodiment. The fieldwork recognises Islamic pedagogy strategies are underpinned by Qur’ānic revelation and shaped by the Arabic cultural significance of the relationship between the oral tradition and memory. Imam Zainal ‘Abideen clearly sets my understanding to the importance of lines of transmission in the context of authenticity with a focus on how the inward shapes the outward.

He stated:

“There is no true worthy lineage of a Quriashi (prophet’s lineage) or of an Arab (to be claimed), except through humility, and no true generosity except through piety, and no true action except through intention, and no true worship except through comprehension. Surely Allah the most high despises the one who follows the Sunna of an Imam but does not follow his (the Imam’s) actions.”

The oral transmission and the linkages through scholarly chains, authenticated to prophet Muhammad, remains instrumental to the teacher and student relationship. My observations of ‘The British Madrasah’ was an environment that valued the lines of transmission as a means to authenticity rather than a tribal connection or scholars with lineage to the prophet Muhammad. But clearly when lines of transmission naturally collide with tribes of historical significant and acknowledged lineage then this typically takes the teaching to a heartfelt connection with students. Again, this re-enforces the chain of oral transmission that illustrates the central notion of 'enduring truths' (Nasr, 1979). The privileged senses substantiates the integral nature of memorisation and oral transmission as being the nexus for sustaining the precision of transmission of knowledge and the sacred (Nasr, 1992).

A Written Mnemonic for the Transmitter

The fourth part of 'coming to our senses', is the didactic approach towards sacred texts. For example in 'The British Madrasah' where teaching involved the student listening to a teacher's recitation, that is given on the basis of written notes or from memory, remained an effective mode of transmission. In the early years of Islam, writing was used for the recording of specific types of knowledge such as hadith, legal rulings, historical information, and poetry (Schoeler, 2006). In Arabic literature it is frequently mentioned, as *ar-riwa-yah al-masuah*, "heard, audited, aural tradition", and inaccurately translated as "oral tradition"⁴. The idea of a written literary publication of the material, is compatible with this concept of transmission. The importance of the publication⁵ is clearly rooted in the personal (Ong, 2000) and the oral transmission in enabling the 'heard' and the 'audited'. The text comes from the oral transmission and documents what has been heard but also maintains flexibility (Ong, 2000). These notes, however, in 'The British Madrasah' were not intended to be disseminated to the public as their main purpose was to serve as an 'aide-memoire' for the transmitters (Sezgin, 1956). This brings us to the holistic nature rooted in the oral tradition, which provides an insight into some of the foundations that influence Islamic pedagogy and issues of authentication from the spoken word. My observations of 'The British Madrasah' is a representative method where notes evolved from written mnemonic aids to systematic collections and finally published books.

⁴ *Oral tradition, are messages or testimony transmitted orally from one generation to another. These were verbally transmitted in speech or song and may take the form of folktales, sayings, songs, prayer or chants.*

⁵ *This process of multiple authorization continued for many centuries.*

In 'The British Madrasah' the types of texts given priority are texts that extend the memorised spoken word and this is fundamental to understanding Islamic pedagogy and its unique attributes. Arabic literature experienced two types of "publication". These types originated from two main sources and these are viewed as '*representatives of the state*' and the '*transmitters*' (Schoeler, 2006). The "transmitters" of the Qur'ānic text hold on to the importance of orality and for example in the context of the Qur'ān oral recitation is viewed to be of high importance. Surah 96:1-5 starts with a command to: "*recite in the name of your lord ...*" (*iqra' bi-'smi rabbi-ka*). Many other surahs start with *qul* which means to "*say*" (Surahs 109, 112, 113, 114). Surah 29: 51 says "*we have sent down to thee the Book that it be recited to them*". Such verses show that, even after the idea of a written revelation has gained prominence, the original concept of the oral recitation of the sacred texts did not lose its importance. The written word and oral transmissions are viewed as two aspects of one revelation. In particular, written records from the 2nd to the 8th century illustrated how texts developed from memorisation and orality (Schoeler, 2006). This also informs and provides an understanding into the eloquence of the language and its importance in the oral tradition and its symbiosis with the sacred text. Here the sacred text or supporting written notes support the oral transmission and the memorisation process. We see the 'coming to our senses' elucidates the connectedness of the sense underpinning the pedagogical approach that is shaped by the privileging of orality (sound), kinesthesia and embodiment. Here I come back to the notion of the 'walking Qur'ān' and the sensoria of prophecy, transmission and the embodiment of sacred knowledge. I was discussing these issues with a teacher who explained

“the book is not the reality and when knowledge is memorised it is easy to teach and embody and it will always be there at the forefront. Imam Ali said that, to revise a dars in one night is better than a thousand night of worship because the memorisation of it is for life”.

Recitation (*qirah*), in ‘The British Madrasah’, was integral to the teaching and learning process and took the form of a student reciting subject material from memory or reading from notes (Boyle, 2007). For example this engaged others and at the same time bolsters up the importance of oral transmission and the spoken word. The teacher typically listened and made corrections. ‘The British Madrasah’s’ teaching was held in what are termed *mugalasaat* (sessions) or *halaqat* (circles), and this reflected a traditional approach towards madrasah teaching (Boyle, 2007). In the many teaching classes I saw an acute understanding of the senses and how this realises in the minds of students. Typically the classes started with a saying of remembrance and this seems to have the affect of connecting people with the moral values embedded in teaching. This is followed by a student reading from the text and this again is engaging and reinforces the importance of oral transmission and the spoken word. Here the use of language is being used to describe the sensorium and the familiarity with the sensoria seems to supports the learning process. The teacher then said

“There is a legacy of writing and by scholar consensus of these issues. There is work done by the contemporary scholar that deals with how knowledge, particularly the legal knowledge, transfers and changes from being in the supplication received, the book and the ability that person has in what situation”.

This example of the teaching environment and the related process of learning is intended to illustrate the teacher-student relationship in the context of knowledge acquisition through memorisation, the spoken word and the importance of transcribing the teachings that takes into account an educational context. The text that is written from the 'heard' is clearly seen to be

superior but in the context of Islamic pedagogy it also illustrates the importance of the close relationship between the spoken word and the development of texts that has been shaped by the prophetic way. Here we see written notes being used to fortify the pedagogical approach to the sensorium and the associated privileges.

Concluding Thoughts

The diaspora and customs of ‘The British Madrasah’, forming our sensory narrative, is subtle and complex in shaping our understanding of underlying influences on the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy. This is typified by ‘The British Madrasah’ diaspora and presents a backdrop for rationalising the teaching and subsequent learning process. Moreover, a culture that emerges from deep within; that is reflected in our hearts and the wider diaspora is important in the social formation within madrasah contexts. As a result, those who have simply looked at madrasah education and social formations from the ‘on high’ and considered them through the amnestic and disembodied lens of theoretical abstraction, are pronounced in the precession of a hegemonic. Moreover, they will likely see madrasah education as being a social rather than spiritual construct. And the Qur’ān declares

“O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware. ...49:13”.

In ‘coming to our senses’ in seeing madrasah experiences I realised that, despite what abstract theorisation might suggest, the diaspora’s shaping of the madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy endures. Moreover what we also see when considering madrasah life is that the notion of the

‘walking Qur’ān’ endures, and it transcends in the form of locally flavored articulations of pedagogy. It is for such reasons that it is so important that educationalists see the shaping of Islamic pedagogy as a spiritual rather than social construct.

To reiterate, ‘coming to our senses’ is a practice relevant to all of us, as individuals, communities and institutions, reflexively engaging in the world around us. For ‘The British Madrasah’ this was seen to shape the interactions between the teacher and learner through orality, facilitating memorisation, and the didactic approach towards the sacred. Islamic pedagogy is dependent on both teacher and student embodiment of the sacred texts and supporting material. From my observations embodiment has a physical and spiritual dimension where prophecy is retained and is inherent to existence and daily practice. ‘Coming to our senses’ compels us to question the veracity we ascribe to Islamic pedagogy, and the underpinning spiritual construct, and heartfelt feelings. It compels us to analyse the stimulus of both knowledge and the sacred. And in doing so it urges us to engage with the physical realm of the seen but also the unseen, as it were, within our heart and soul.

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