Communication in the Early Islamic Era: A Social and Historical Analysis

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Abstract: *This article underlines the place of communication in Islam. The analysis closely links the historical phases of development of Islam to the development of communication media and modes in society, and highlights the structural relationship between communication as a fundamental human behaviour and the belief in, and the call for, Islam as basically communication-oriented religion.*

Islam is a communication-based religion. The basic miracle of al-Qurʾān lies in its extreme eloquence and literary sophistication that none of the acknowledged Arab poets and orators could match. All through the verses of the Qurʾān, reference is continuously made to the importance of communication for the call to Islam. The Qurʾān uses such concepts as *balāgh*, *daʿwah bashīr*, *nadhīr*, *tadhkirah*, and *Mawʿiẓah* to communicate Allah's message to people. The two most central Qurʾānic concepts of *waḥy* (revelation) and *waswasah* (Satanic promptings)[1] are communication-related concepts. The former denotes a Divine communication of Allah's teachings, the latter refers to Satanic communication of evil deeds. The two basic guides of Islamic social and political behaviour, al-Qurʾān and Sunnah, are communication-based. The first and foremost guide, al-Qurʾān, communicates the fundamental principles of Islam and lays the foundation of Islamic behaviour. The second, the Sunnah or the deeds, utterances, and trait approvals of the Prophet (SAS), elucidate and clarify these principles and relate the abstract to reality. A third reference, *ijtihād*, the Islamic method of independent reasoning and analogy,[2] is an important source of Islamic legislation. *Ijtihād* is also communication-based because it involves continuous reference to basic texts, analysis, inference, and deduction. A fourth element of Islamic jurisprudence and political decision-making, *ijmāʿ* or consensus of the *ʿulamāʾ*, is also

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communication-based as it implies deliberation and consultation among the elite of the ummah, the *ʿulamā*.

This article argues for the centrality of communication in Islam, and analyzes socially and historically, the development of the Muslim community from oral to written communication modes. The article argues for a positive social and cultural impact of this development, and sees communication as catalytic in the contribution of Muslims to human civilization.

Communication Among Early Muslims

The earliest Muslim community experienced several social developments as it evolved from a group of believers to a thriving political community and, later, to a state. When Islam dawned on Arabia, oral communication was the basic mode of social interaction among the people. Like other Arabs of the desert, Muslims used oral communication for social interaction: for information, socialization and propaganda. Since orators and poets enjoyed a high social status in the Arab community, Muslims had the same social respect for eloquent orators and poets. The Prophet (SAS) was known to have a special poet, Ḥassan ibn Thābit, who dedicated his poetry to the glorification of Islam and the Prophet (SAS). Another Muslim poet, Kaʿb ibn Zubair, was honoured by the Prophet (SAS)'s own *burdah* (cloak) for composing and reciting poems of allegiance to Islam. The Prophet (SAS) himself, however, did not use poetry for the purpose of the *daʿwah* (call to Islam). The Divine will for him was not to learn poetry, and for that matter not to use it: "We have not instructed the (Prophet) in poetry, Nor is it suitable for him" (36:69).

The rationale for the Prophet (SAS)'s refrain from poetry is obvious.[3] Had the Prophet (SAS) resorted to poetry, the miraculous eloquence of Qurʾān could have been attributed to the Prophet (SAS)'s poetic talents, thus reducing the Divine Book to a humble human endeavour.

As Islam grew and the community of Muslims gradually transformed into a state, communication modes experienced several developments that led, in the end, to the adoption of written communication and resulted in the evolution of the community into a thriving civilization.

Qurʾān: A Communication Miracle

The miracle of Qurʾān is communicational. Qurʾān is a form of communication that is neither prose, nor *sajaʿ* (rhymed prose). Poets

and well-versed literary Arabs were unable to come up with a style similar to, and as eloquent as that of the Qur'ān. A famous witness to the uniqueness of Qur'ān is al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, a prominent tribal celebrity who attested that what Muḥammad came up with was neither a work of a diviner nor of a mad person or a magician.[4] Unable to find a suitable definition for what the Prophet (SAS) has brought, al-Walīd concluded that Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) had magical eloquence. He, therefore, warned people against being spelled by listening to the words of magic.

Thus, the inability of Arabs to match the Qur'ān is considered the miracle of the Qur'ān. It is a communicational miracle because though it involves words and verses, no one could ever match its style. The inimitability of the Qura'nic style was well described by al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, who said: "there is sweetness in its beginning, and beauty in its end… and it resembles no human discourse". This uniqueness made the non-believers level the accusation of magic on al-Qur'ān, and accuse the Prophet (SAS) of being a diviner, or of being a magician whose magic was eloquence.[5]

The story of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's conversion to Islam attests to the magnificence of the Qur'ān. ʿUmar's conversion was a product of his close encounter with several Qura'nic verses. Being the ferocious person he was, his subjection to the few verses of the Qur'ān that his sister and her husband were reading, turned him into a completely different personality whose "heart was mellowed and soul was reassured."[6] Husein Haykal attributes this complete transformation of one of the most prominent figures of Islam, to the majesty of al-Qur'ān and "the nobility of its call and the magnanimity of its message."

Oral Communication in *al-Madīnah*

Political and social communication in the early Islamic community was oral. As the State of *Madīnah* was geographically limited, face-to-face communication was the dominant style of interaction. The leader and the followers were closely linked, communication was direct and feedback was simultaneous. Thus, the revelation of the verses of al-Qur'ān to the Prophet (SAS), a solemn moment that Muslims revere as *nuzūl al-waḥy*, was lived by the members of the community, who, in some cases witnessed the actual moments in which the Prophet (SAS) received the revelations. These revelations would then be communicated to the companions who would immediately exchange the text and learn the verses by heart. From a network analysis perspective, the entire *Madīnan* political set-up could be envisaged as consisting of a central social network of communication in which the Prophet (SAS)

occupied the key position, with the companions as members in the network. Other existing social networks functioned, under the closely-knit social fabric of the Arabian community, as peripheral networks, or satellites, to the main network of the Prophet (SAS) and his companions.

In an oral community in which few could write or read, innovative modes of teaching and learning were needed. The face-to-face relationship between the Prophet (SAS) and his companions and followers developed an effective and unique mode of communicating Islamic teachings and behaviour through "vicarious learning."[7] In the early Islamic community, Muslims carefully noticed the Prophet (SAS)'s deeds and behaviour, and imitated them. In other words, people learned from the deeds and behaviours of the Prophet (SAS); what communication scholars of today call "observational learning."[8] The Prophet (SAS) himself encouraged this style as he urged his companions and followers to "pray as you see me pray." This style was essential because of the novelty of the religion and its rituals, and because most of the companions and followers were illiterate. The tradition of imitative learning continued even after the death of the Prophet (SAS), as the companions and followers kept consulting close confidantes of the Prophet (SAS) to know what his reaction and behaviour was in certain situations. A famous reference in this respect was the Prophet (SAS)'s wife, ʿĀʾishah (R), who used to inform Muslims on the ways in which the Prophet (SAS) behaved.

Political communication under *al-Madīnah* political set-up was based on a popular form of oral communication, *al-khuṭbah* or oratory. *Al-khuṭbah* was not peculiar to Arabia, for it was known to other communities centuries before; but the Arabian community was much accustomed to *al-khuṭbah* as a style of public communication. A famous Arabian oration and poetry recitation place was "Sūq ʿUkāẓ," where prominent Arab communicators displayed their abilities of eloquence. Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) used the Mosque as the main venue for delivering *al-khuṭbah*, but he also used other venues and social gatherings for the same purpose. *Al-khuṭbah* was perhaps the most effective form of political communication during the Prophet (SAS)'s life and during the period of his successors, the four Guided *khulafāʾ*. Its political importance was further emphasized and institutionalized by the inclusion of a major *khuṭbah* in the Friday prayer, thus enabling the rulers to communicate weekly to all community members, policies and important state activities. The *khuṭbah* of the two ʿīds (*al-fiṭr and al-aḍḥā*) provided further opportunities for yearly political assessment of the state of affairs between the Prophet (SAS), and later *Khulafāʾ*, and

the people. Later, when the state expanded, *al-khuṭbah*, particularly Friday *khuṭbah*, served the purpose of proclamation of political allegiance to the ruling *khalīfah* by calling Allah (SWT) to preserve and guide the *khalīfah* as the leader of the Ummah. As the *khilāfah* disintegrated into separate political entities toward the end of the *ʿAbbāsid* era, the call for the *khalīfah* during Friday became symbolic and served no genuine political purpose.

As a Messenger, the Prophet (SAS) used oratory for the purpose of dissemination of the Divine message. His style resembled very much the style used by the orators and poets of the era, the propagandist of the various Arabian tribes. He, however, resorted more to persuasion than to propaganda, except, when there was a need for such a style. No better example can be given for the Prophet (SAS)'s style of persuasive communication than his first announcement of the his mission, when he stood on mount *ṣafā* in response to the Divine command to him: "Therefore expound openly to what thou art commanded, and turn away from those who join false gods with Allah" (15:49). In his address to the audience of his tribe and near kindred, the Prophet (SAS) resorted to rational rather than emotional appeal (a style of communication that distinguishes persuasive from propagandistic messages). His first *khuṭbah* resorted to deductive logic by calling upon the tribes of his kith and kin, and asking them whether they would believe him if he were to tell them about an imminent danger of an enemy cavalry ready to attack against their quarters. When his tribes-people answered that they would believe in him because they have known him to be truthful and honest, he then told them:

> Verily, al-rāʾid[9] does not lie to his people…. Even if I lied to all people, I will not lie to you…. By Allah, I am the messenger of Allah to you in particular and to all people in general... By Allah, you will die just as easy as you sleep, and you will be resurrected just as easy as you wake up… You will be recompensed on account of what you do, earning good for good and evil for evil….[10]

A clear resort to logic is detected here. This approach in addressing the oral community enabled the Prophet (SAS) to introduce a more civilized style of communication that helped in refining the Muslim community and purifying it from the social illnesses of the *jāhiliyyah* period.

Certain other *khuṭbah*s stand as prominent in the history of Islam. The Prophet (SAS)'s *khuṭbah* on the (first and) last *ḥajj* he performed before his death, known as "*khuṭbat al-wadāʿ*" (sermon of farewell), is perhaps the most famous because the Prophet (SAS) outlined in it major

social and religious matters, and underlined basic themes that became
central in Islamic social behaviour. For example, the *khuṭbat al-wadāʿ*
touched on the issue of the treatment of pre-Islamic practice of *ribā*
(usury), and the issue of social stratification as well as on some aspects
pertained to treatment of women. This is another good example of the
Prophet (SAS)'s distinct style of oratory, with its extensive resort to
prosing, and the consistent usage of the different techniques of rhetoric,
especially metaphor, simile, allegory and parallelism. The following
translated excerpts from the *khuṭbah* will help make this point clear:

> O People: Verily your blood and property are sacred to one another until
> you meet your Lord, like the sanctity of this day of yours, in this month
> of yours in this city of yours… Verily every transaction of *ribā* is
> annulled, but you will have only your capital. You will neither commit
> injustice, nor will you be wronged. Allah has decided that there should
> be no *ribā*, and the *ribā* of al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭallib is
> annulled…
> Verily, all blood feuds from the time of *Jāhiliyyah* are annulled. I start
> with annulling the blood feud of the son of Rabīʿah ibn al-Hārith ibn
> ʿAbd al-Muṭṭallib…
> Verily, the virtues prized during the *Jāhiliyyah* are annulled except *al-
> sidānah* (maintaining the Kaʿbah) and *al-siqāyah* (providing pilgrims
> with water)…
> Oh people. Listen to what I say and comprehend it: Know that every
> Muslim is the brother of the other Muslim and that all Muslims are
> brethren. No Muslim is allowed to take from his brother's property
> except what he gives in good faith. Oh People your Lord is one and your
> father is one, all of you are from Adam and Adam was created from
> clay. Verily an ʿArab has no virtue on a non-ʿArab except by *al-
> taqwā*…[11]

Another famous *khuṭbah* is the *khalīfah* Abū Bakr's *khuṭbah* on the
occasion of his choice as a *khalīfah* after the death of the Prophet (SAS).
The importance of this *khuṭbah* lies in the fact that it outlined the
policies of the *khalīfah* and underlined his style of leadership. Though
not all the *khuṭbah* received historical attention, some have been
documented in history because of their relevance to certain political,
social or legal matters. Some of these *khuṭbah*s include those exchanged
during the two *ʿaqabah* allegiances (*bayʿat al-ʿaqabah*), and the
various *khuṭbah*s that several orators delivered on the "Day of the
Saqīfah," when Muslims deliberated the succession to the Prophet
(SAS). ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb upheld positive political values in one of
his *khuṭbah* as he declared that he was mistaken and (a protesting)
woman was right. He also laid down the foundations of accountability
of the ruler to the ruled when he positively responded to a listener who

interrupted his *khuṭbah* demanding to know why ʿUmar wore a piece of garment larger than what was distributed to the rest of the people.

Written Communication in Islam

Scholars of communication strongly emphasize the place of writing in human development. Writing provides power over nature as well as over people. Recording information enables comparison and analysis, and makes easier the prediction and control of natural phenomena.[12] Those who write and read are always seen as socially privileged and more powerful than those who are unable to read or write.

Being a communication-based religion, Islam all along, emphasized and upheld written communication. The first revealed verses comprise a divine command to the Prophet (SAS) to read, whereas the totality of the Qurʾān is concretized in a book, the Qurʾān. The term Qurʾān is in itself an indication of the centrality of written communication. It describes the Holy Book in reference to the activity of reading. This continued emphasis of written communication is perhaps a Divine reminder of the fallibility of human beings and the subjectivity of undocumented reality, when it comes to preservation of information and knowledge orally.

The importance of written communication is emphasized, both metaphorically and literally, in several *āyāt* (verses) of the Holy text. Metaphorically, some verses refer to the verb "write" and its derivatives to underline a Divine order or to endorse a good behaviour. Deeds of people in their life are written by two angles that are labeled the custodians. *Al-lauḥ al-maḥfʿūẓ* is the book of judgement in which each person's deeds are written and evaluated (85:22). People on the day of judgement are given books that contain their judgement and asked to read them (69:19). When Allah (SWT) refers to man's fate, He always refers to it in relation to writing: "*kataba ʿalā*" (6:12); or "*kutiba ʿalaikum*" (2:180).

When an obligation or an order is to be emphasized, it is described in relation to writing. In *sūrah* 2, *āyāt* 178;180; 183; 216; and 246 refer to writing as an emphasis of the obligation.

Literally, the Holy Book underscores writing when Muslims are to deal in worldly matters with each other because of the forgetful nature of humans. Ayah 282 of *sūrat al-Baqarah* reads:

> Oh you who believe! When you deal with each other in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing. Let a scribe write faithfully as between the parties: Let not the

scribe refuse not to write: As Allah has taught him, so let him write. Let him who incurs the liability dictate, but let him fear his Lord Allah, and not diminish ought of what he owes. If the party liable is mentally deficient, or weak or unable himself to dictate, let his guardian dictate faithfully. And get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women such as you choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her. The witness should not refuse when they are called on (for evidence). Disdain not to reduce to writing (your contract) for a future period, whether it be small or big: It is juster in the sight of Allah, more suitable as evidence, and more convenient to prevent doubts among yourselves, there is no blame on you if ye reduce it not to writing. But take witness whenever ye make a commercial contract; and let neither scribe nor witness suffer harm. If ye do (such harm) it would be wickedness in you. So fear Allah; for it is Allah that teaches you. And Allah is well acquainted with all things. (2:282)

Written Communication in *Madīnan* Set-up

As Islam spread and the state expanded, distance became an issue of prime importance in the formulation of communication policies of the Islamic State. The objectives of spreading Islam and communicating with distant fellow Muslims were difficult to accomplish with the supremacy of oral communication. A form of communication more suitable for the religious, social and political needs of the expanding state had to be adopted.

Though most Muslims in the early days of Islam were illiterate, the Prophet (SAS) used the skills of the few who could read and write for the various purposes of the *daʿwah* (correspondence, writing of treaties, etc.). As the stage was set for the expansion of the state, the Prophet (SAS) began emphasizing written communication by occasionally requesting some of his companions to write down the *āyāt* (verses) revealed to him so that "what was written would match what was in the chests of the companions."[13] Some of the companions wrote the revealed verses on their own because they feared their personal inadequacies as forgetful human beings. Thus, companions like ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Muʿādh ibn Jabal, Ubay ibn Kaʿb, Zaid ibn Thābit, and ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd kept almost all of the verses of the Qurʾān in written form, though not as a single unified text.[14] These companions wrote the Qurʾān on various materials: bone, animal skin, palm risps, and parchment.

Though the use of written communication was limited in the early years of the *Madīnan* political set-up, a gradual need for it developed as the community progressed. When the state grew into a more complex

structure, the Prophet (SAS) began a gradual shift toward written communication on both the local and international levels. On the local level, the developing state began using written communication for more than one purpose. It is used for the documentation of important political covenants, truces and agreements with the tribes of ʿArabia, like the famous *ḥudaibiyah* truce with *Quraish*, or the written covenant between *al-anṣār* and *al-muhājirīn* of *Madīnah*.[15] The latter, the covenant of *Madīnah* is considered by several sources as the first written political document in Islam.[16] It is considered the Constitution of the first Muslim State, as it organized and detailed the relationship among the Muslim clans, on one hand, and between the Muslims and non-Muslims in *Madīnah* under the leadership of Prophet Muḥammad (SAS).[17] The Prophet (SAS) also corresponded with some prominent tribal leaders of Arabia on several social and political occasions. Most of these messages were invitation to Islam sent the various tribal leaders and their followers. These messages were presented in persuasive arguments about Islam as the true religion of Allah (SWT).[18] On the economic level, some of the holdings and properties of the state, the date trees and animals, were also mentioned in writing.[19] As the State advanced, writing became an important institution of the state, several companions were assigned as official writers for administrative, economic, religious and political purposes. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, for example, was one of the prominent official scribes of the Prophet (SAS).[20]

Administrative units developed around these scribes and later, during the eras of the rightly guided *khulafāʾ*, several *dīwāns* or ministries that corresponded to these administrative units were also established.

On the international level, the *Madīnan* political set-up employed written communication for political correspondence with important world leaders.[21] The Prophet (SAS) corresponded with monarchs and emperors of Persia, Byzantine and Abyssinia, informing them about his Divine mission and calling them to Islam.[22] The style of the Prophet (SAS)'s letter writing resembles that of modern-day political correspondence: brief and direct. Though brevity in today's political writing may be attributed to the complexities of the present time, in the early days of the Islamic state, two reasons could be cited for their brevity: [a] the nature of the Arabic language, and the scarcity of the writing materials. The Prophet (SAS)'s message to the Byzantine ruler is an example of the typical style he used in diplomatic correspondence.

The exchange of political messages with monarchs and emperors of the time was a clear sign of the evolution of the Muslim community into

a full-fledged state. An evolution to which, we believe, the shift from
oral to written communication was a necessary prerequisite.

Written Communication During the Period of *al-Khulafā᾿ al-Rashidīn*

As society shifted gradually from oral communication to writing, two
major communication problems faced the authorities: writing down the
holy text, and reading it. *khalīfah* Abū Bakr, faced the first problem
when many of the Prophet (SAS)'s companions who memorized al-
Qur᾿ān by heart were martyred in the apostasy wars. Seeing many of
these *ḥuffāẓ* martyred, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb suggested to Abū Bakr
writing down al- Qur᾿ān as a single text because he feared that the
annihilation of the *ḥuffāẓ* might endanger the preservation of the holy
text. *khalīfah* Abū Bakr consulted other companions before accepting
the proposal because he was aware that writing al-Qur᾿ān might open
unnecessary doors to text alterations as a result of either human
fallibility, or acts of deliberate mischief. The *khalīfah* then honoured a
trusted companion of the Prophet (SAS), Zaid ibn Thābit, with the duty
of compiling and scribing, in one place, and after due verification of
each *āyah*, a full text of al- Qur᾿ān. Zaid described his mission as being
"heavier than moving mountains".[23] Zaid was, however, able to compile
and verify all the *suwar* (chapters) and *āyāt* of al-Qur᾿ān and produced
a single manuscript which the *khalīfah* Abū Bakr kept himself and later
returned to *khalīfah* ʿUmar.[24]

The second communication problem that the expanding *Madīnan*
community faced was the diversity of reading styles. In the Arabic
language, dialectical differences make people pronounce words, and
assign meanings, differently. These differences in meanings of words
then lead to variations in interpretation of texts. The expansion of Islam
during the reign of *khalīfah* ʿUthmān to all of Arabia and some parts of
Asia, made this issue a serious one, especially with regard to the reading
of the Qur᾿ān. As the new lands included Arabs of different dialects and
Muslims who were not Arabs, the Qur᾿ān was being read across these
lands in different dialects of Arabic. Noticing the possible textual
diversions that might arise from such variations of readings, *khalīfah*
ʿUthmān requested scribes to write a single book with a standard style
of reading (*qirā᾿ah*). Once it was completed, the *khalīfah* made several
copies of the new book and has them distributed to various centrer
throughout the vast Islamic *khilāfah* which became known as
ʿUthmān*'s muṣḥaf*. Today, ʿUthmān's *muṣḥaf* remains a landmark in
the history of Islamic communication as it provided the first official text
of al-Qur᾿ān written in one version of the Arabic language.[25]

The issue of the unification of readings is very important when viewed from a communication perspective. Culturally speaking, context plays an important role in comprehension and interpretation, and words, phrases and expressions may have different meanings in different cultures. Some scholars use the term "symbolic interaction"[26] to refer to this concept of collective cultural interpretation of meaning. They believe that meaning is socially constructed, and that social groups share the same meaning. The expansion of the Muslim world during *khalīfah* ʿUthmān's era was remarkable and has led to the evolution of a culturally diverse Muslim world. Such an expansion must have comprised culturally diverse contexts in which social groups constructed meaning according to their different cultural contexts, thus leading to differences in interpretations of fundamental messages and texts, including the Qura'nic text. *khalīfah* ʿUthmān's decision to unify the reading style for all Muslims was a wise decision that took into account that different interpretations of the holy text would open doors to religious and political differences, and could put the whole concept of the unified Ummah in jeopardy. Judged on the ground of its potential social and political impact on society, the *khalīfah*'s decision must then be commended as a genuine attempt to sow the seeds of social harmony by creating a unified system of meaning among society members.

In the promotion of written communication, it is imperative to note the significant contribution made by ʿUmar ibn al-Kaḥṭṭāb in laying down the foundation of a modern society. The *khalīfah* developed the embryonic administrative units that the Prophet (SAS) left into full-fledged bureaus for administration and control, and staffed them with scribes whose duties were to organize information and keep records. These bureaus kept all the vital records of the *khilāfah* in written form and built the first Muslim archives. Some of the famous bureaus of ʿUmar's *khilāfah* were *dīwān al-jund*, or the Bureau of the army, *dīwān al-kharāj*, or the bureau of taxation, *bait al-māl*, or bureau of finance, and *dīwān al-barīd* or the bureau of post. Though all these bureaus reflected the inception of written communication in society, the last one, *dīwān al-barīd* was instrumental in the promotion of writing as the official form of communication. The bureau established the first regular system of communication between the *khalīfah* and his *wālī*s (governors) and ʿ*āmil*s (commissioners) and laid down the foundation of an Islamic tradition of executive correspondence, filing and archiving. Though the Prophet (SAS) and the *khalīfah* Abū Bakr used writing before him, but it was *khalīfah* ʿUmar who established written political correspondence as a system of the state. As the Muslim State was beginning to expand and wars were being fought far away from the capital, ʿUmar had to maintain close contacts with his army

commanders, governors and officials in the newly opened lands. Oral correspondence was no more suitable to elucidate on battle plans, or to elaborate on the art of governing and controlling people. He, therefore, resorted to sending lengthy and detailed messages that elaborately outlined his views and ideas. Two famous correspondences of *khalīfah* ʿUmar that are praised by modern-day military and law scholars are his messages on the legal practices to his judge Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿrī, and on the art of combating and commanding to his army commander, Saʿd ibn abī Waqqāṣ.[27] His message to al-Ashʿrī is much admired for its establishment of the fundamentals of Islamic legal and court procedures like establishment of evidence by the claimant. The message to Commander Saʿd is seen as a detailed articulation of the duties of both the commanders and the soldiers in all phases of the battle.

With these and other related developments and practices, the Islamic State was finally evolving from oral communication, to writing. Distance, the major factor that made all societies shift from oral to written communication, was also behind this Islamic shift. When *khalīfah* ʿUthmān and *khalīfah* ʿAlī assumed the *khilāfah*, written communication was already an established institution in the State. The various official *dīwān*, the system of *barīd* (post), and a burgeoning literate community strengthened the institution and rendered it instrumental in the development of society. Such a unified system that the standardized style of reading might create, would lead, in the long run, to social stability and political unity.

Writing the Ḥadīth of the Prophet (SAS)

Prophet Muḥammad (SAS)'s Sunnah is the second most sacred guiding principles for all Muslims.[28] During the life of the Prophet (SAS), there was little need for the writing of ḥadīth because the Prophet (SAS) was still alive and access to him was always possible. The issue of writing the ḥadīth was, in itself, controversial even during the life of the Prophet (SAS). Basically, it has been suggested that the Prophet (SAS) discouraged the writing of his utterances and, in some cases, even forbade it.[29] He, however, later allowed writing of his utterances. When the Prophet (SAS) passed away, writing the utterances was not an issue in the beginning because reliable narrators were present and verification of the ḥadīth was always possible. The two *khulafāʾ*, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, continued the tradition of discouragement, according to the reliable sources they refused to give consent to, or order, the writing of ḥadīth.[30]

The reason behind this position was, obviously, a desire not to provide suggestions of equality between the words of Allah (SWT) and

those of His messenger. The two *khulafā'* felt that if they had condoned or ordered the writing of the utterances, then that would insinuate equality between the utterances and al-Qur'ān. The Prophet (SAS), however, seemed to have stood against the writing of his utterances only at the beginning of the mission, just as suggested by the sources that later he allowed many of his companions to write them. Thus, towards the end of the Prophet (SAS)'s life, famous companions like Sa'ad ibn 'Ubādah al-Anṣārī, Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh, and Abū Hurairah possessed many written texts of the utterances.[31]

There was no definite official policy towards the writing of the ḥadīth until the end of the first century of *hijrah*. The general consensus, at the time, was to treat the matter cautiously in order not to create misunderstanding and differences among the Muslims. However, it was the Umayyad *khalīfah*, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (717-720), who adopted the first official policy towards the writing of the ḥadīth. *Al-khalīfah* wrote to his commissioners asking them to trace and write down every verified ḥadīth of the Prophet (SAS). 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz feared what he called "the devastation of knowledge" as a result of the death of the knowledgeables, i.e., the companions and the respected narrators of the ḥadīth.

The trend set by *khalīfah* 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz continued which ultimately ushered in the era of the narrators (*the muḥaddithīn*). These narrators laid down the foundation of Islamic scientific thinking and analysis through their critical analytical approaches to text verification. Writers and narrators began to specialize in different aspects of the Sunnah and applied rigorous scientific methods in their inquiry. Some of the *'ulamā'* concentrated on the utterances of the Prophet (SAS), others on the battles and wars Muslims fought, whereas some others documented the eras of the *khulafā'* and chronicled the events and activities of the periods. Such diversified intellectual concern sowed the seeds of the magnificent Islamic cultural renaissance of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid eras.

Conclusion

Communication is central to Islam. The main sources of guidance of Muslims, al-Qur'ān and Sunnah, as well as other major references of Islamic behaviour like *ijmā'* and *ijtihād* are substance of tools of communication.

A social and historical analysis of the development of the Muslim community from a group of believers clustering around the Prophet (SAS), to a thriving state that extended across Asia and Africa

underlined the role of communication, in both its oral and written form. During the early days of *Madīnah* and even before, oral styles of communication dominated and constituted the base for both persuasion and control. After the expansion of the state during the *Khilāfah* of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān and ʿAlī, the written form of communication gradually replaced the oral one. Various institutions, media, and practices affected such transformation.

Notes

1. M. Tehranian, "Communication Theory: An Islamic Perspective" in *Communication Theory: The Asian Perspective,* ed. W. Dissanayake (Singapore: AMIC, 1988), 188.

2. Ibid., 189.

3. Despite a dislike for poetry, he is reported to have said "certainly there is wisdom in poetry" (*inna fī al-shʿir la-ḥikmah*).

4. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *The Life of Muḥammad,* trans. Ismāʿīl Rājī al-Fārūqī (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1993), 118.

5. Ibid.,118.

6. Ibid.,104.

7. Vicarious learning (or imitative learning), in modern social psychology, is an acknowledged mode of communication behaviour through which people observe, learn and adopt behaviour. See, for example, Albert Bandura *Principles of Behavior Modification* (New York: Holt, Rienhart and Watson, 1969).

8. Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1977).

9. In Arabian customs of the desert, a *rāʾid*, is a person assigned to locate places of water for his tribe.

10. This and other sermons of the Prophet (SAS) were translated into English in *Selected Friday Sermons* (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers, 2000).

11. Much of the rhetoric style may have been lost in the translation. For a clearer picture of the styles refer to the original text of *al-khuṭbah* in Arabic.

12. D. McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, 4th ed. (London: Sage, 2000), 78.

13. M. Al-Gaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Lebanon: Muʾassat al-Risālah, 1982). 124.

14. Ibid., 124.

15. Ṣafwat A. Zakī, *Jamharat Rasāʾil al-ʿArab Fī ʿUṣūr al-ʿArabiyyah al-Zāhirah* (Cairo: Musṭafā al-Ḥalabī, 1937), 25.

16. M. Ḥamīdullāh, *Al-Wathāʾiq al-Siyāsiyyah Li al-ʿAhd al-Nabawī wa al-Khilāfat al-Rāshidah* (Beirūt: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1987), 59-62.

17. Ibid., 26.

18. Ṣafwat A. Zakī, *Jamharat Rasāʾil al-ʿArab,* 43.

19. A. Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-Aʿshāʾ Fī Ṣināʿat al-Inshāʾ* (Cairo: Al-Haiʾat al-Miṣriyyat al-ʿĀmmah Li al-Kutub, 1985).

20. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Kittānī, *Niẓām al-Ḥukūmat al-Nabawayyiah* (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1970), 123. The Prophet (SAS) laid down the foundation of his administration of the new state by establishing several administrative units to which the scribes were attached. Seven categories of official writers or scribes were present at one time in the *Madīnan* political set-up: writers of the revelations (*waḥy*), writers of messages to Kings, writers of messages to Arab leaders and covenants, writers of the personal affairs of the Prophet (SAS) and contracts, writers of *zakāt* and *ṣadaqāt* (donations), writers of the soldiers, and holder of the Seal of the Prophet (SAS).

21. For a variety of such letters and messages see Ṣafwat A. Zakī, *Jamharat Rasāʾil al-ʿArab*, 31-57.

22. Ibid., 56.

23. Al-Gaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith Fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān,* 127.

24. A. Von Denffer, *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1994).

25. Ibid.

26. J. Manis, and B. Meltzer, *Symbolic Interactions: A Reader in Social Psychology* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978).

27. M. Hamīdullāh, *Al-Wathāʾiq al-Siyāsiyyah Li al-ʿAhd al-Nabawī*, 88.

28. A. Zeidan, *Al-Wajīz Fī ʿUlūm al-Fiqh* (Cairo: Dār al-Tawzīʿ wa al-Nashr al-Islāmiyyah, 1993), 168.

29. M. A. Hamudah, *Tarikh al-Kitāb al-Islāmī al-Makhtūt* (Riyyādh: Dār Thaqīf li al-Nashr, 1991), 119.

30. Ibid., 20.

31. Ibid., 20, 21.