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The Dying tradition of Family dialogic - Dehumanization of Humanities

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Abstract

This paper studies the impact of family dialogic as an important tool of cultural pedagogy in Pakistani society. We intend to focus upon the main aspects of training of youth through the traditional dialogue within family while focusing upon the Islamic teachings in this regard. The central hypothesis enquires whether the family dialogic has lost its pedagogical dimensions. Has the contemporary dialogue within a family preserved its fundamental role of training the youth in a persistent yet discrete manner? How does the family dialogic serve to build the contemporary society? Does it provide enough motivation among the family members, stimulating the need for quest, research and knowledge on one hand and, help them abstain from immoral and unethical social acts, on the other? How does the personality of an individual reflect the impact of family dialogic in professional and social surroundings? How the family dialogic influences, builds and leads towards the societal progress especially in the current 21st century? The present enquiry is based on the presence of a disconnect of family dialogic on two levels: the individual, and the society at large. This study determines the role of family dialogic in educating the youth and inculcating values and morals through the possible four generations: inheriting traditions from grandparents to parents and through our children to grandchildren, preparing them to counter the ever growing challenges in the paradigm of contemporary society.

Keywords: Disconnect; Family dialogic; Shari'ah; Societal progress; Tradition.

Introduction:

The central question of this paper explores and highlights the impact of family dialogic as an important tool of cultural and instructional pedagogy in Pakistani



society. Importance of dialogue in any situation cannot be denied. Within the scenario of a family, it serves as an effective tool to educate our children and to transfer the culture from one generation to the next. As an early pedagogical tool in our home environment, the family dialogic can be defined as an informal exchange of ideas between the elders and the young members of a family during informal and casual home lounge sittings.

This research focuses upon the importance and effectiveness of Family Dialogic in contemporary society in comparison to the previous century. It also highlights the main aspects of training of youth through the traditional dialogue within a family besides elaborating the pedagogical significance of such dialogues to inculcate traditional, moral, cultural, social and religious values and to stimulate maturity in thought process and reflection.

Research questions:

This paper attempts to find answers to questions such as: Has the contemporary dialogue within a family preserved its fundamental role of training the youth in a persistent yet discrete manner? Whether the family dialogic has lost its pedagogical dimensions? What are the main factors hindering this communication within a family? How does the family dialogic serve to build the contemporary society with Islamic values and traditions? Does it provide enough motivation among the family members, stimulating the need for quest, research and knowledge on one hand, and help them abstain from immoral and unethical social acts, on the other? How does the personality of an individual reflect the impact of family dialogic in professional and social surroundings? And how does the family dialogic influence, build and lead towards the societal progress especially in the current 21st century?

Objective:

The primary objective of this paper is, hence, to determine the role of family dialogic in educating the youth and inculcating values and morals through the possible chain of four generations:

By inheriting traditions from grandparents to parents and through our children to grand children;

By preparing them to counter the ever growing challenges in the paradigm of contemporary society through the teachings of the Holy Quran and the traditions and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him.

We also intend to probe the presence of a disconnect of family dialogic at two levels:

At individual level;

And at collective level, the society at large;

Methodology:

This project is conducted under mixed method research: In the first part, meaning of the term Family Dialogic and its significance is studied. This introductory part is followed by verifying the tradition of Family Dialogic and its importance through Islamic teachings and Quranic verses. The second part of this project is based on the interview and survey conducted among a group of 35 parents hailing from socially different and mixed backgrounds. Although it was a random sampling method, yet equal representation of high income and low income families residing in Lahore city was taken into account. Interview questions were developed to have the survey of parents regarding our main research statement and the research questions mentioned in the previous section. Data thus obtained was analyzed to ascertain the validity of our central hypothesis and research statement.

Discussion:

Our discussion spans over two axes:

- Current state and nature of family dialogic in Pakistani society
- State and nature of family dialogic according to Islamic Shari'a

In this regard, we will try to identify the role of family dialogic in education and in inculcating social values according to Islamic teachings.

Meaning and significance of Family Dialogic:

Family Dialogic means an exchange of ideas among the members of a family on everyday subjects. This exchange leads the interlocutor towards a more mature and deeper reflection while providing him exposure towards the type of behavior preferred and desired in various situations of our daily life. Such a dialogue allows children, as well as adults, to express themselves in front of parents and elders of the family who, in turn, guide and share the relevant experiences. These family dialogics can be witnessed at home when elders return from office and kids from school, or during lounge sittings, in front of the television, at the evening snack tray, at the dinner table, in the kitchen or during family get togethers, etc.

The didactic and pedagogical perspective of this dialogue is central in the training of young people. This fruitful exchange thus establishes the first informal school in the life of a child and continues to exercise its role of trainer even when one is grown up. Moreover, this art of communication also makes it possible to foresee the problems, to identify the obstacles, and to learn how to handle them. It helps the young ones to frame relevant and coherent questions, to reason with logic, and to polish the art of presenting one's arguments and accepting the truth. Family dialogic serves as a great tool to teach, guide and overcome the behavioral problems widespread in our society as a whole. The most important of these behavioral

problems are: - anger, - jealousy, - the lust for luxury and money, - greed, - arrogance and contempt, - the desire to be famous and to be great in the world.

All the personality related social acts are governed by well defined rules in Islamic Shari'a, for example : practicing the habit of truthfulness, abstaining oneself from telling a lie, avoiding fake stories and false excuses, criticizing others in their absence, significance of respect of parents, elders, guests and neighbours, etc. Besides these acts of social grooming, the family dialogic is also a medium to share the ideal life aspects of the Holy Prophet, may peace be upon him, for example, how to react in difficult situations, how to behave in anger, in distress, in grief, in joy, etc.

Significance of Family Dialogic through examples from the Holy

Quran:

The lessons pertaining to religious and social aspects of daily life are traditionally transferred to the next generations through the family dialogic in an Islamic society and derive their essence from the Quranic teachings. The following verses make it obligatory for the family head and elders to train their family members so that they can be protected from the hell fire:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ ﴾

"O you who believe, save yourselves and your families from a fire, the fuel of which will be human beings and stones ... " ¹

This guideline enjoins every head of the family to take care of the upbringing of his family members so as to save them from that fire of the Last Day of Judgment, for which the fuel will be stones and humans. The intensity of that fire is reflected through the fact that even the hard stones on the last day would serve as fuel for its burning. The well known commentary of Quran by the Prophet's companion, Ali bin Abu Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, asks all the believers to instruct and guide their families.² His son Hassan رضى الله عنه also confirms this type of informal method of instruction at home :

نُعَلِّمُهُمْ وَنَأْمُرُهُمْ وَنَنْهَاهُمْ

³
"We teach them, instruct them (to do good), and stop them (from what is forbidden)."

﴿ وَأَذْكُرْتَبَّ مَا يَتْلَىٰ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ مِن آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ ﴾

⁴

“And be mindful of Allah’s verses and the wisdom that is recited in your homes. Surely, Allah is All-Kind, All-Aware.

It is hence clear that since the times of the Prophet, peace and salutations be upon him, his companions and believers used to practice knowledge sharing in their families in order to educate, groom and guide the members of their family according to the teachings of Islam with the objective to build their character and to inculcate in them high morals and values as desired for a Mo’min in Islamic Shari’ah. The recitation of Quranic verses at home, retaining their essential and central message, and applying it in one’s daily routine – all that implies that the parents as well as the heads of the family are responsible to provide a favorable ambiance that can harbor and promote such learning. And it is in this very context that the family dialogic is the richest activity of learning in home environment. In the source cited as above, Al’Kiya reiterates the fact that it is an obligation for us to instruct and teach our families and children.⁵ Moreover, in the Holy Quran, one finds several instructions highlighting the significance of teaching and grooming the personality traits of the members of one’s own family. We will mention some of the examples as follows:

﴿وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَاصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا﴾⁶

“Bid your family to perform Salah, and adhere to it yourself.”

The Salaat constitutes the fundamental pillar of Islam. The Quranic instruction to offer salaah as well as to teach it to your family members is a proof of its utmost importance, which is otherwise also mentioned in a many other Quranic verses and in examples of prophetic traditions as well:

﴿إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ﴾⁷

“Surely Salah restrains one from shameful and evil acts.”

The shameful and evil acts to be restrained from, as mentioned in the above cited verse, are explained in detail by several scholars. Amongst them, for our current study about the pedagogical aspects of family dialogic, we will refer to the source of Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali’s Forty Foundations of Religion⁸, that elaborates the step by step guide for the spiritual development and character and personality building as laid down in Islamic Shari’ah. The note of recommendation by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (Rahmatullah alaih) in its Urdu translation⁹ of Maulana Ashiq Ilahi (Rahmatullah alaih) appreciates the didactic and pedagogical values of this

text. The book highlights the acts and personality traits to be adapted and nurtured in one's personality according to the Islamic teachings. For example:

- To be helpful, generous and forgiving towards others
- To respect the rights of others
- To manifest kind and gentle behaviour
- To earn one's living by Halal means
- To eat only Halaal and avoid Haraam
- To act as the Prophet, peace and salutations be upon him, acted in his daily routine and to follow his Sunnah and footsteps in every matter

Imam Al-Ghazali also highlights various social ills that are so commonly spread in our society and suggests their remedies according to the Shari'ah and Prophetic teachings. The most common and major ills of personality as mentioned by Imam Al-Ghazali are:

- Anger
- Jealousy
- Hypocrisy
- Back biting and related ills of tongue
- Lust and covetousness for money and luxury
- Avarice and greed
- Arrogance, disrespect and disdain
- Pursuit of worldly fame and renown
- Love and attachment for this material and temporary world
- Self admiration and egotism
- Lack of sincerity and loyalty in one's actions

Besides identifying different evils and ills in one's behavior followed by their active examples from our daily life and suggesting remedy for each one of them, the author specifies those traits and characteristics that are recommended in Islamic Shari'ah. The reader finds the value and worth of those who repent to Allah Almighty, who nurture fear and love of Allah Almighty, and observe patience, manifest satiety, express their gratitude towards their Creator, who depend on Him in every matter, who try to express goodness and purity of character, and who believe in the destiny and life in the hereafter.

All the above mentioned acts constitute the main context and pedagogical essence of our traditional family Dialogic, the latter being the most effective way at home and within family to introduce such moral values and personality traits to our kins as well as to our next generations. Professing the values of restraining from what is prohibited in our Islamic society and exercising and adapting the traits of good

moral conduct as appreciated and taught in the Islamic Shari'ah is in fact what makes a real Mo'min and a true believer of Allah Almighty. The pedagogical value of family dialogue can also be witnessed in other verses of Quran:

﴿وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ، وَخَفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِمَنِ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

10

“And warn the nearest people of your clan, and be kind with humbleness to the believers who followed you.”

The last testament of the noble philosopher Luqman is also mentioned in the Quran:

﴿يَبْنَئِي أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْهَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا أَصَابَكَ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عَزَمِ الْأُمُورِ﴾

11

“My dear son, establish Salah, and bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair, and observe patience on what befalls you. Surely, this is among the matters of determination.”

The instructions to keep reminding near ones and dear ones at home about the teachings of Islam and the values to constitute a valuable and well recognized Islamic society indeed confirm that the family dialogue and discussion has a central and important place in developing the character and personality traits according to the fundamentals of Islam. The family dialogue is also a source to strengthen the family bonding. The significance of such lessons taught to one's family members can also be witnessed through the following verse of Quran in which Allah Almighty addresses the Prophet Nuh, peace be upon him, thus testifying that the acceptance and respect accorded to the family members of a Mo'min is also based on the virtuous deeds and character manifested by the family members otherwise they risk to fall out of the category of belonging to a Mo'min family:

﴿قَالَ يَنْحُوحِ إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ إِنَّهُ عَمَلٌ غَيْرُ صَالِحٍ﴾

12

He said, “O Nuh, in fact, he is not a part of your family. Indeed, he is (a man of) bad deeds.

Education is one of the best things that a father gives to his children. And the most practical and effective platform to impart this education is through the daily

قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ : كُتِبَ لَكُمْ رِجَالٌ ، وَكُتِبَ لَكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رِعْيَتِهِ : الْإِمَامُ رِجَالٌ وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رِعْيَتِهِ ، وَالرَّجُلُ رِجَالٌ فِي أَهْلِهِ وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رِعْيَتِهِ ، وَالْمَرْأَةُ رِجَالٌ فِي بَيْتِ زَوْجِهَا وَمَسْئُولَةٌ عَنْ رِعْيَتِهَا ، وَالخَادِمُ رِجَالٌ فِي مَالِ سَيِّدِهِ وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رِعْيَتِهِ ، فَكُلُّكُمْ رِجَالٌ وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رِعْيَتِهِ .

discussions around the table during meals or during the casual lounge sittings with the family. Each member of the family thus has a certain part of responsibility in coaching each other and this role is also emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad, may peace and salutations be upon him:

13

The Prophet, may peace and salutations be upon him, said: All of you are (like) shepherds and each one of you will be questioned about his flock. A man is the shepherd of the people of his house and he is responsible for them. A woman is the shepherdess of the house of her husband and their children and she is responsible for them. And the servant is a shepherd (too) and is responsible for the wealth and property of his Master. Each one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock.”

The merits of learning through Family Dialogic can also be noted in the following tradition:

عن حذيفة بن اليمان رضي الله عنهما قال : قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم :

فَضْلُ الْعِلْمِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ فَضْلِ الْعِبَادَةِ وَخَيْرٌ دِينِكُمُ الْوَرَعُ .

14

Gaining knowledge has higher virtues than worshipping and the best in your religion is Waraa’, (i.e. leaving at times what is permissible for the fear of not falling into that what is forbidden.)

In Sahih Bukhari, we find another tradition reported as follows, that focuses upon teaching, instructing and grooming of one’s family members according to the lifestyle of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and salutations be upon him:

عَنْ مَالِكِ بْنِ الْحُوَيْرِثِ، قَالَ: أَتَيْتَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، وَنَحْنُ شَبَابَةٌ مُتَقَارِبُونَ، فَأَقَمْنَا عِنْدَهُ عِشْرِينَ لَيْلَةً، قَالَ: وَكَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ رَحِيمًا رَفِيقًا، فَظَنَّ أَنَّا قَدِ اشْتَقْنَا أَهْلَنَا، فَمَسَأَلَنَا عَمَّنْ تَرَكْنَا فِي أَهْلِنَا، فَأَحْبَبْنَا، فَأَحْبَبْنَا، فَقَالَ: " ائْتِجِعُوا إِلَى أَهْلِكُمْ، فَأَقِيمُوا فِيهِمْ، وَعَلِّمُوهُمْ، وَمُرُوهُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَتِ الصَّلَاةُ، فَلْيُؤَدِّئْ لَكُمْ أَحَدُكُمْ، ثُمَّ لِيُؤَمِّكُمْ أَكْبَرُكُمْ .

15

“Abu Sulayman Malik ibn al-Huwayrith said, "We came to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, being young men of a similar age. We spent twenty nights with him. He thought that we desired our own people and he asked us about those of our family we had left behind, and we told him. He was merciful and kind, and

said, 'Go back to your family. Instruct and command them. Pray as you have seen me praying. When it is time for the prayer, then let one of you give the adhan and let the oldest of you lead the payer.'

Yet another tradition from the Prophet reprimands those who are in oblivion and do not cater to this important aspect of providing training in our daily life at home:

كَفَى بِالْمَرْءِ إِثْمًا أَنْ يُضَيِّعَ مَنْ يَتَّقُوهُ

16

“It is sufficient for a person to be (counted) as a sinner when he neglects (the rights of) those who are his liability.”

And among the rights of one's dependents in an Islamic society are, besides the provision of food and shelter, provision of good moral training and character building and guidance towards how to live a successful life as a Mo'min and how to prepare for the life hereafter. The basic teachings in this regard that the family elders traditionally used to share through the family dialogue are based on Tauheed - the belief in oneness of God, belief in His Prophets, Angels, Sacred Books, the day of Resurrection and in Destiny. The secondary teachings include the five pillars of Islam and the associated ways to perform those acts as taught by the Prophet peace and salutations be upon him. For example, teaching the young ones how to offer Salaah is the responsibility of parents and elders as it becomes obligatory for the child to offer it regularly five times a day after attaining the age of seven years; motivating them towards fasting by teaching them the great virtues attached to it. The tertiary level teachings focus upon the children's character and capacity building by sharing with the kids the events from the lives of Prophet and his companions and inspiring them to act in the footsteps of these role models.

Regarding these pedagogical aspects imparted to the younger generations through family dialogue, a survey was conducted among a group of 35 parents. The survey included the following interview questions:

1. Do you think family dialogue is important in training and grooming our children?
2. When and how often do you communicate with each other in the family?
3. What topics are generally discussed during such family sittings?
4. In your opinion, does a solid family dialogue affect the pedagogical and social performance of your children?
5. Does it provide enough motivation among the family members, stimulating the need for quest, research and knowledge on one hand and, help them abstain from the immoral and unethical social acts, on the other?
6. Is contemporary family dialogue effective to inculcate religious and social values in our children?

7. Do you think that current trends of family dialogue are different than that of your own childhood?
8. What are the main reasons of communication gap within family nowadays?
9. How does the family dialogic serve to build the contemporary society?

Results and Analysis:

Major results obtained from parent's responses are shared as follows:

1. Majority of the parents agreed that the family dialogue is important to inculcate religious and social values in our children.
2. Only 5% of the parents did not believe much in the importance of family dialogue in the training of their children.
3. Almost 50% of the parents endorsed the hypothesis that the family dialogue positively affects the pedagogical and social performance of their children.
4. Around 65% of the parents were of the view that their current family dialogues are less frequent than that in their own childhood and that we have lost the pedagogical value of family dialogic in our society.
5. A good family bond can assist a child in all the spheres of life by motivating him to perform better in educational field and to show an exemplary character by inculcating the good values with a great deal of good family dialogic. A good communication within family builds a confident personality that leads towards the societal progress especially in the current 21st century.
6. Almost 50% of the parents admitted that the communication gap between them and their children has widened. Amongst the main reasons of this ever increasing communication gap were the modern life style habits of eating and sleeping, new technological trends, switching from traditional book reading habits to online sources.
7. 25% of parents, conscious of the cultural and educational value of strong communication within the family, claimed to do extra effort to create a good family dialogic.
8. Only 10% of the parents said that they are focusing upon the family dialogue as a means to improve the moral, religious, social and pedagogical aspects of their children.
9. Research proves that a child coming from a family where family dialogic still holds its value proves to be a brilliant student, a responsible citizen, a perfect head of family and a great human being.

Conclusion:

To conclude our above mentioned discussion and survey results, we can now infer that:

- The traditional practice of teaching, training and grooming the children through family dialogue at home is seen to be less and less in vogue in the contemporary society, as shared by majority of parents. This confirms our initial statement that this tradition is disappearing day by day.
- Most of the parents who themselves have been through this type of grooming do not observe this tradition anymore, despite the fact that they are conscious of its benefits and advantages. Hence efforts are needed to revive this important pedagogical tradition.
- Studies prove that children coming from a family having a strong communication system and family dialogue, show better results in education as well as in professions. They prove to be responsible citizens, good human beings and successful parents.
- Major reasons for the disappearing tradition of family dialogic according to our survey results, include the excessive use of advanced technological devices of telecommunication, and extensive use of internet at home, that has dominated and disrupted the daily family communication and dialogue.
- This has resulted into a significant disconnect between the elders, parents and the next generation, widening thus the generation gap and reducing the space for a possible family dialogue.
- The dying tradition of family dialogic has thus been replaced by this disconnect between the family members, to which can also be attributed the exigencies of professional life of the modern society and increased working hours due to the globalized market needs.

The real challenge is how to respond to this ever widening disconnect in the current household situation to revive and preserve the Family Dialogic. Reviewing the above mentioned examples of Prophetic instructions and guidance and in the light of the specific verses from Holy Quran in this regard, we can now infer that, besides scholars, the major responsibility lies on the household members to play their role in the character building of the next generation and to devise such methods as to keep well connected with the young ones by engaging them in Family Dialogic. The future implications of this paper offer and invite other researchers to explore practical ways to engage the family members in this dialogue and to recommend ways to reconnect the family as a strong fundamental unit of the society that needs rehabilitation, reformation, and protection against the dehumanization of humanity!

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