

Education and Muslim Women – The Contribution of the Wives of Prophet Mohammad

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Abstract

The Holy Qura' n ordained that acquiring knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim and this narration applies to men and women equally. Knowledge in this context does not refer to knowledge of the Holy Quran only as no Muslim should be ignorant of his/her faith but also covers the other areas of general education which contribute to the welfare of society. Women in Islam are completely free to educate themselves, make contracts, and be entitled to inherit as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife. According to the eminent scholar Ibn Asakir, plenty of opportunities were available for women's education in the 12th Century in the medieval Islamic World. He stated that women could study and earn Ijazahs (Academic Degrees) and qualify as scholars (ulama) and teachers. He further elaborates that he himself had studied under 80 different female teachers in his time. It is very unfortunate to realize that the majority of women are ignorant about the rights given to them by Islam. It is particularly the ignorance about their religion among Muslims that has created the oppression of women since women believe that it is not right for them to demand their God-given rights, the process of this suppression continues with the following generations. According to the Sachar Committee Report "majority, that is, about 69-75% of Muslim women in India do not want to educate their daughters beyond primary level of education". This paper has presented the details of the services rendered by renowned Muslim women and their educational status in the previous centuries. The purpose is to highlight the issues Muslim women are confronted with. Today's women can compare their situation with the women in the past and realize what conditions they have come down to.

Keywords: Education, Muslim women, Contribution, Education, Rights, Islam, Status, Women.

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Introduction

Acquiring knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim (Al-Tabarani). The messenger of Allah Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) said. This narration "applies

equally to men and women." Knowledge in this context does not refer to knowledge of the Holy Quran and only as no Muslim should be ignorant of his/her faith, but also covers the other areas of general education which contribute to the welfare of the

society (Hadiths Al Tabarani). Throughout Islamic history, men and women both gained respect as scholars and teachers. The books of Rijal Al-Hadith (Reporters of Hadith) contain many names of prominent women like Hazrat Ayesha and Hazrat Hafsa.

The historical facts present a totally different scenario than what is believed and prorogated today since throughout history, the scholars were found in Muslim men and women equally. Historically, women played an important role in the foundation of many Islamic educational institutions such as Fatima al Fihri, an Arab woman, who founded the Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque in 857–859 AD in Fez, Morocco. She is also known as Umm-al-Banīn "Mother of the Children". The Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque, which subsequently developed into a teaching institution, became the modern University of Al-Qarawiyyin in 1963 which continued through to the Ayyubed dynasty in the 12th and 13th Centuries. Fatima and her sister were well educated and had inherited their father's wealth, both of them founded Mosques in Fes; Fatima founded Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque and her sister Maryam founded the Al Andalusiiyyin Mosque. Out of 160 mosques and madarasas [schools] established in Damascus, 26 were funded by women through Waqf (charitable trusts) system. Half of all the royal patrons for these institutions were also women.

According to the eminent scholar Ibn Asakir, plenty of opportunities were available for women's education in the 12th Century in the medieval Islamic World. He stated that women could study and earn ijazahs (Academic Degrees) and qualify as scholars (ulama) and teachers. Ibn Asakir further elaborates that he himself had studied under 80 different female teachers in his time.

In 19th Century West Africa, Nana Asma'u, daughter of Shehu Usman dan Fodio was a leading Islamic scholar, poet, teacher, and an exceptionally genius Muslim female writer who wrote more than 60 books. Her brother who was a Caliphate used to respect her advice in administrative matters due to her intellectual capacities. She also maintained the records of written instructions, discussed and indulged in official discourse with foreign delegates and scholars. Well-educated in the classics of Arab, having command over four languages, Arabic, Fula, Hausa, and Tuareg; Asma' u is not only revered as a scholar of Nigeria today but also considered a precursor to modern feminism in Africa and as an epitome of an independent woman under Islam. In more than 60 literary works written over 40 years, Nana Asma'u left a large body of poetry in Arabic.

Like most of her family members, she became a prolific author. She had created almost 1830 cadres of women as an educational project that began to integrate the poor and rural women, training teachers who travelled across the Caliphate. Teachers called *jajiss*, travelled throughout the Caliphate educating women in the students' homes. Each of these *jajis* used the writings of Nana Asma'u and other Sufi scholars through recited mnemonics and poetry to train a group of learned women. The republishing and translation of her works in recent times have brought so much attention to the purely literary value of her prose and poems. She is the subject of several studies in the modern era of the 21st Century.

In fact, women's education in Islamic society was propagated and inspired by the Prophet Mohammed's (pbuh) wives Bibi Khadija R A, Bibi Ayesha R A, Hadith, who was a scholar and a military leader. Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) praised

the women of Madinah due to their services dedicated to knowledge.

The records of history reveal that there was a rise in the number of female scholars after 12th Century. Al Sakhawi, a historian of 15th Century, devoted an entire volume of his 12 volume biographical documentary 'Daw – al – Lame' to female scholars describing about 1,075 of them.

In early Muslims history female Muslims who fought during the conquest as soldiers and generals included Nusaybah Bint Ka'ab Al Mazemiyyah or Umme Ammarah, Aisha, Khaula and Wafeira. A striking reality about the medieval hospitals was the role of female staff who were never found employed in any part of the world then. Medieval muslim hospitals employed female nurses, and physicians, the most famous two physicians were from the Banu Zuhri family.

Literature Review

Al Quran- The Holy Quran is an authentic source of knowledge, information and confirmation with its originality/sanctity which was revealed by the God upon Prophet Mohammad [pbuh] as per the belief of Muslims across the globe. The Quran explicitly states that men and women are equal before God and that none is prioritized upon the other and instructs Muslims to educate their daughters. Quran's declaration about women is to be made clear through the mention of the Verses and the Sayings of Prophet Mohammad [pbuh].

The other source of information used in the Paper is from the book by **Ibrahim Amini (1925-2020)**, an eminent and prolific writer who has contributed 34 volumes of books concerning a variety of religious, political, social and ethical

issues. In his book "An Introduction to The Rights and Duties of Women in Islam", he quoted all the verses from the Quran which proclaim the various rights given to women in Islam. The Ayats/ Verses quoted from the Holy Quran make the book an authentic source of knowledge since Quran is the word of God as believed by Muslims.

Afzal Wani, (b-1957) was a member of the 19th Law Institute, a Professor of Law, a member of Delhi Legal Services, the Law Commission of India and many other academic bodies. He has authored and edited more than 12 books and 100 research papers on Women and Law, Islamic Jurisprudence etc. This article Wani Afzal M- "Enforcement of Mehr by Muslim Women: A Case of Reconsideration", Published in Indian Journal of Social Work, 57; 2, April 1996, reviews the concept of Mahar in Islam. It quotes extensively from Islamic texts to explain Mahar. Its enforcement in India due to ignorance about this right among Muslim women is a matter of discussion in this article.

Sachar, Rajinder (2006), The Muslim Demography of India: Sachar Committee Report, December, pp.48-68. This was a High-Level Committee established by the government of India in the year 2006. The main objective of this Committee was to study the Social, Economic, and Educational Status of Muslims in India. This committee was headed by Justice Rajinder Sachar, the former Chief Justice of Delhi High Court. The findings of the study revealed that the educational status of Muslim women is not satisfactory as it was found that 42.72% of the total population of Muslims of India are

illiterate, and the illiteracy rate among Muslim women is as high as 48.11% which is lower than the national average of females-65.46%. [Source: based on 2011 Census].

S. Laurel Weldon - Purdue University, Indiana; Mala Htun-University of New Mexico- “Religious Power, the State, Women’s Right and Family Law”- Published by Cambridge University Press for the Women and Politics Research Section; Politics and Gender-11 (September-2015), 45-477. In this article the authors collected a comprehensive data about the various rights established as family laws for women. The matter of concern here was the sex discrimination and gender bias in the implementation of the family laws due to the interference of political authorities. The qualitative analysis of this article suggests that patriarchal family law threatens religious authority. The discriminatory factor is not any particular religion but the states’ interference and interpretations. [Gill 1998-2001] The state, not religion, thwarts advances in human rights.

The source of information about **Fatima al Fihriya**, an Arab woman who is credited with founding the Al Qarawiyyin Mosque in 857–859 AD in Fez, Morocco, is retrieved from Wikipedia. She was the one who contributed greatly to the field of education and was one amongst a few who worked for the emancipation of society in general and the upliftment of women’s status in particular. It was quite inspiring to know that a lady worked so boldly in the times dating back to the 9th Century.

The historic women of Islam, The Wives of Prophet Mohammad [pbuh], Bibi Khadija (RA) and Bibi Ayesha (RA) are exemplary women who have set a record

of compassion, love towards humanity and services to society beyond compare, hence to mention about their participation, involvement, and services was necessary so as to establish the fact that Islam neither prohibits women to study, do business, or to have a commitment towards any social work. These ladies were the pioneers in the spread of Islam and shared their abilities during the advent of Islam. They have set an example for women to be educated, courageous, and be good companions amongst their families.

The various websites mentioned in the Reference section of this paper were the sources from which the other information was retrieved and added.

The Rights Women Enjoy Under the Aegis of Islam

It is very unfortunate to realize that the majority of women are ignorant about the rights given to them by Islam. It is particularly the ignorance about their religion among Muslims that has created the oppression of women since women believe that it is not right for them to demand their God-given rights, the process of this suppression continues with the following generations.

The various civil, social, political, and economic rights which have been given to women in Islam are extraordinary. The Quran and the Quotes of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) are the sources from which women derive their rights and duties.

1. **Human Rights-** Quran 4:1 says " Since men and women both come from the same essence, they are equal in their humanity". Similarly, neither gender can be superior

- contradicting the sense of equality.
2. **Right to Worship-** More than 14 centuries ago, Islam made men and women equally accountable to God in worshipping Him. Men and Women have to pray, fast, give charity, go on pilgrimage, and refrain from the activities prohibited. Both men and women are encouraged to do charity. Wives can do so from her husband's income. Hazrat Ayesha (RA) reported that Hazrat Mohammed (pbuh) said "A woman will receive reward (from Allah) when she does the charity from her husband's earnings."
 3. **Right to Own Wealth and Property-** A Muslim woman can keep her property earned or inherited and spend it as she pleases. She can enter into legal contracts business etc. She can inherit from her relatives also. The Holy Quran states "for men there is a share and for women, there is a share of what parents and relatives leave whether it is little or much (Quran 4:7).
 4. **Civil Rights-** Islam respects the opinion of women and freedom of expression, women are encouraged to contribute their opinions and ideas. Islamic ideals have always been open and accessible.
 5. **Participation in Wars-** When a woman asked Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) to allow women to participate in war, Prophet replied "for them the war is without fighting" (Quoted from the Sayings of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh)). Nevertheless Prophet permitted women to nurse the injured. An Ansari woman Umme Aliya said " I

have participated in 7 battles with the Prophet, I used to guard camels, cook food, treat injured and nurse the sick.

6. **Political Rights-** In Islam, women can voice their opinion and participate in politics. Quran (60:12) ordered Prophet Mohammad that when women come to him and swear, he must accept their oath. This order established the right of women to select their leader. Abdur Rahman Ibn Arif consulted many women before he recommended Osman Ibn Affan (RA) to be the Caliph.

Besides all these Rights there are also personal and social, marital, and property rights given, like the freedom to choose her husband, the right to guarantee in war, the right to have share in her parent's and husband's inheritance, participate for the promotion of good and elimination of the evil. And also, the right to have custody of her children, are the priceless possession granted to Muslim women.

The Contribution of the Wives of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH)

Hazrat Khadija (RA), An indicator of the attitude of the Quran to women in the workplace is indicated by the quotes. There are examples of two female shepherds in the Quran (28:23). Khadija (the Prophets' wife) who was an eminent business woman is called upon as a role model for females in the Quran. Khadija was the favorite slave of Allah and the first wife of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). She was unique, incomparable, and special in the sight of Allah who sent his greetings saying "If Muslims are sincere in expressing their gratitude to Khadija, they should spike the falsehood and the story of her life, these falsehoods have been in circulation for much too long Quran (Chapter 93, Verse 11) May Allah bless

Khadija and may He elevate her to the highest ranks in the hierarchy of his true and faithful friends Quran (chapter 89, verses 27-30). Khadija earned the titles like 'Princess of Quraysh, and Al – Tahira, (the Pure one), due to her impeccable personality and virtuous character (Holy Quran Verse no. 27-30-Chapter- 89). She used to feed & cloth poor, assist everyone financially.

There is a need for the Muslim Community to study the life of Hazrat Khadija (RA) to get to know about the services she has rendered for the upliftment of the society and the sacrifices she has made throughout her life.

Hazrat Bibi Ayesha

The contributions of Hazrat Ayesha are great. She possessed immense love of knowledge, had greatest intelligence, her life is a proof of a woman who can learn, exert influence over men and provide them the inspiration and leadership. She was far more beneficial than men of her times. Bibi Ayesha proved her prowess not only as a genuine collector of the Hadiths but also as a counsellor. Scholars turned to her for the authentication and clarification regarding laws and order. Besides this she earned the reputation as a scholar for her legal pronouncements which are highly regarded and studied throughout the world even today. The Caliphate of her times sought her direction and guidance whenever required in official matters. Much of her time was spent in learning and acquiring knowledge. Ayesha is out of 4 persons who transmitted more than 2000 saying (Hadiths) of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh). Her knowledge of Hadith was passed on in written form by 3 persons including her nephew Hazrat Urwah, one of the greatest scholars.

Many of the greatest companions of the Prophet and the followers were benefitted from Ayesha. Abu Musa al Ansari had

said " If we, companions of the messenger of Allah had any difficulty regarding a matter, we asked Ayesha about it. Hazrat Urwah asserts that her knowledge of fiqh, tibb (medicine), and poetry was incomparable, she advised on the questions of inheritance which required a skilled mathematical mind. Scholars regard her as one of the earliest fuqaha of Islam along with persons like Umar Ibn Khattab, Ali [RA], and Abdullah bin Abbas. In spite of all these qualities, she was actively-involved in bringing social reform, educating the masses, and was an eloquent orator.

Besides all the academic and social duties, Hazrat Ayesha had taken the responsibility of bringing up orphan girls and boys who were in her custody, trained, and guided them with care, which had turned her house into a school and an academy. The example of Hazrat Ayesha (R.A) in promoting education, and teaching the laws and the rudiments of Islam needs to be followed today.

After Kadijatulkubra, Ayesha Siddiqua is regarded as the best woman in Islam due to her strong personality, she was a leading figure of knowledge in society, in politics making her the most respectable woman of her times and forever. She is reported to have handed over 2210 Hadiths directly from the life of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh).

Muslim Women in India

Muslim women in India lag behind on the educational front and have become weak voices due to their ignorance. Women, in general, are subjected to oppression and suppression resulting in their subordination throughout history irrespective of socio-economic, demographic, and religious differences. Across the world, women are still neglected, and treated as second-class

citizens making them vulnerable to all kinds of atrocities.

The modern age is the age of transformation including women struggling towards freedom and identity. Muslims are minority in India, the position of muslim women is even worse because of general anxiety prevalent regarding the safety of girls. Moreover, it is also the general attitude of parents, their ignorance fears and inhibitions which prevent Muslim girls from educating themselves.

According to Sachar Committee Report "majority i.e, 69-75% of muslim women do not want to educate their daughters beyond primary level of education. Further many middle- class women having requisite qualifications are not allowed to seek employment. Muslims in general are at double disadvantage with a low level of education combined with poor quality education making them highly deprived".

Regarding 'Meher' which is the gift from a husband to his wife at the time of marriage, the husband is bound to present suitable marriage gift out of his property and possessions to his wife. How many women actually know about the nature and significance of the right, and how many actually receive this gift? The situation regarding claiming this right cannot improve without the proper education of women about this right.

Discussion

The Paper attempts to establish the fact that Islam does not prohibit, condemn, inhibit or is against of women's education. But this is also a fact that women in India lag behind in the literacy rate and that their percentage or literacy rate is very low. The matter of discussion here is that what makes them perform so poor in the field of education. It is a misconception among Muslims and the society that Muslim girls

do not study and achieve higher education due to the religious restrictions.

The verses quoted from the Holy Quran, not only instruct women in Islam to study but also have made it mandatory for men and women that they must learn and become educated. The examples of Prophet Mohammad's [pbuh] wives given also establish that they were free to acquire, pass on, teach, and practice freedom in educating the masses, establishing schools and academies, participating in war, do business, chose husbands and give opinions and act as a witness.

The various sources and references used also support the writer's claim that Islam actually propagates the acquisition of knowledge for both men and women. But on the contrary, the findings of the Sachar Committee Report revealed that the literacy rate among Muslims and Muslim women is the lowest in the country.

Hence the purpose and the matter of concern is to know the reasons of Muslims, being the largest minority of India is lagging behind in education. The third largest number of Muslims in the world live in India. Education of Muslim Women is to be enhanced and to be encouraged on a priority base to make them independent and to make them aware of the Rights Islam has given to them.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the details of the services rendered by renowned Muslim women and their educational status in the previous centuries. The contributions, sacrifices, and devotion towards the educational practices, elaborations,

clarifications in the legal matters, important decisions, services to humanity, incomparable humbleness, and empathy of the wives of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) are also discussed briefly along with the rights given to women in Islam.

The purpose is to highlight the issues Muslim women are confronted with. Today's women can compare their situation with the women in the past and realize what conditions they have come down to. The women enjoyed all the rights, freedom in the past. There were many prominent Muslim women possessing leadership qualities who were outspoken and had contributed in rebuilding the society. The rich history with great women achievers in all walks of life from 7th Century enlightens us that Islam does not come in the way of women's progress. Scholars believe that any interpretation of the Qura'n that is discriminatory about women is not at all in accordance with the spirit of Islam

Gender being a developmental issue, should be dealt with sincerely and carefully. We must have proper policies for bringing about social, economic, and political equality. Religious heads, philanthropists, religious heads, government agencies, policymakers, administrators, and above all women themselves have to come out and stand up for the cause of women empowerment in general and the upliftment of Muslim women in particular making the educational and working opportunities available and accessible to them.

The purpose of life can be the service to humanity but it should be in an ideal manner. Household work is not the only responsibility for women since they are no less competent than men folk. They are CEO's, lead organizations, and are capable of doing any task. Girls and women should be allowed to speak out, express their wishes and views

Suggestions

There is a need to encourage women's education using media to make Indian Muslim women in particular aware of their rights and duties as bestowed to them by Islam. Senior women of the family are against sending girls to colleges, and professional courses barring their growth. Our young daughters and sisters in Islam need awareness, and encouragement from their mothers. Mothers are needed to be enlightened first so that they became strong enough to take decisions. There is a need for the Muslim community to study the lives of Hazrat Khadija (R.A), Hazrat Hafsa (R.A), and other leading ladies of the past to lead successful lives and be progressive.

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