

Educational Services of Women at the Dawn of Islam

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Abstract

In the modern world a negative picture of Islam has been projected regarding women basic rights as education based on Islamic restrictions on Hijab which is no doubt a loose and perverted message. It is totally the other way around if the true picture of Islam is looked into with an unbiased and unprejudiced mind. Islam has granted an honorable status to woman in every field of life. As man, woman has also been included in the commandment of Quran even if masculine format of the word is used, which reflects equal importance of woman in the Islamic perspectives. Thus the prophetic sayings about getting education do not single out men to get knowledge and leave behind women uneducated. This is the reason we find in our history a huge list of women who made miracles in education and enlightened the Ummah with their rich thoughts. Their valuable contribution is an everlasting candle of knowledge for humanity.

This article deals with such several Muslim women at the dawn of Islam who devoted their lives to education and made wonders in it. The article will thus prove that women always have as equal contribution as men when it comes to knowledge and education and that Islam has not been and can never be a hindrance in all that adds to the advancement and progress of Muslim society. The article is divided into the following points:

- 1) *Importance of Woman Education in Islam*
- 2) *Education of Ummahat Ul Mu'mineen*
- 3) *Education of wives of Sahaba R.A*
- 4) *Conclusion and Suggestions*

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1: Importance of Woman Education in Islam

Education means to enlighten ones' mind with the knowledge that provides the way to success; which is the ultimate goal of human beings. It is education that distinguishes and brings difference among people as Al-mighty Allah said in the Holly Quran:

“هل يستوي الذين يعلمون والذين لا يعلمون”⁽¹⁾

“Can people who know be equal to those who don't know!!”

” (Quest of العلم فريضة على كل مسلم “⁽²⁾The Prophetic sayings:

” حَيْرَكُمْ مَنْ تَعَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ وَعَلَّمَهُ “⁽³⁾ knowledge is obligatory open every Muslim) and (The best among you is the who learnt Quran and then taught it to others) gives crystal clear message of Islam about the importance of knowledge, and there is no restriction for women in it.

This is something that brings difference between a man and a woman too; as knowledge is something that gives you distinction, no matter whether you are a male or a female. Thus, in terms of education and getting knowledge, human beings are all equal. All have the right to education, as all have the right to life and survival.

The toughest impediment the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W faced in the way preaching Islam was the illiteracy of Quresh of Makkah. Before the Emergence of Islam, there existed no Educational system in the Peninsula of Arabs. The darkness of illiteracy prevailed. That's why; the Quran's first revelation was:

”اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق...”⁽⁴⁾

“Read with the name of Allah who created...”

The first commandment of Allah to his prophet and ultimately to the humanity is about learning via reading, which is one of the basic sources of knowledge. This shows the importance of knowledge in the Islamic perspectives.

The Prophet Muhammad being a teacher took too much interest in the education of men and women equally as he thought that education could be the only way to move forward socially politically and economically. Dr. Shamim Haider Tirmizi wrote:

“The daily routine of teaching and preaching of Islam was not confined to men but women also got their respective and essential part of knowledge of Islam, as the Prophet S.A.W fixed a day in week for women's education wherein they would ask questions about Islam and the Prophet S.A.W would answer them”⁽⁵⁾

It is appropriate to mention that, for women, there were only few domains of knowledge at the early days of Islam. Those include the knowledge of Quran, Knowledge of Hadith, and Islamic Jurisprudence, poetry (literature) and Gynecology.

2: Educational Services of Wives of the Prophet

The wives of the Holly Prophet S.A.W commonly called as Umahaat ul Mu'mineen, (the mothers of the believers) were the direct recipients and in some cases addressees of the revealed knowledge of Quran. The prophet S.A.W lived among them. They saw and observed him 24 hours. They sought knowledge directly from him. They observed him practicing and preaching Islam to the close and first addressees of Arabia.

Syeda Ayesha Siddiqah R.A

The closest and nearest of wives of the Prophet S.A.W to him was Syeda Ayesha R.A. She was the one the Prophet loved the most among his wives due to her extreme love and quest for knowledge.⁽⁶⁾ This was the reason, many Sahaba, after the demise of the holly prophet S.A.W, came to seek her views in many problems they would face and she never disappointed them. One of her students Urwah bin Zubair praises her vast knowledge:

"لقد صحبت عائشة فما رأيتُ أحدا قطُّ كان أعلم بآيات أنزلت ولا بفريضة ولا سنة ولا بشعر، ولا أروى له من أيام العرب ولا بنسب... ولا بقضاء و طب منها"⁽⁷⁾

"I remained in the company of Hazrat Ayesha R.A. I have not seen anybody knowing more than her about the background (shan-e-nazool) of Aayat, obligatory duties, sunnah, poetry, literature, history, Gynecology and even medical (tibb)." The prophet S.A.W himself asserted her depth and love of knowledge when he said: "Seek knowledge (ilm) from Aisha"⁽⁸⁾

The prophet's life had two fronts; domestic and outdoor. Being a guide for the Ummah in his domestic and outdoor activities, an essential part of his life was out of reach until uncovered by his wives especially Aisha R.A..

That's why an honest proclamation can be made that if Aisha had not narrated the prophets' domestic dealing to the Ummah, half of his life would have been missed.

Ibne Hajar al Asqalani has referred Atta bin Abi Rabbah as saying: "Among people Hazrat Ayesha R.A was the greatest of jurists, having more knowledge than any lady and the best opinion maker in the public matters."⁽⁹⁾

Similarly, Imam Zahabi says about the Excellency of Ayesha R.A:

“In the women Ummah of the Prophet S.A.W, no knowledgeable person is known to me than her.”⁽¹⁰⁾

She is the one who narrated about 2210 ahadith from the messenger of Almighty Allah, out of which 174 ahadith are muttfq Alaih. 54 of them are found in Saheeh al Bukhari and sixty-nine in Sahih al Muslim.⁽¹¹⁾

She was not restricted to her own rituals (*Ibadah*) at her home. But rather she was a teacher to a huge number of men (Mahram) women and kids. Many Tabi’een who were master of Hadith, Fiqh and Tafseer remained her students. Nearly fifty women learned the commandments of Islam from her and became authorities.⁽¹²⁾

Umm e Salama R.A

Among the prophets ‘wives, Umm e Salam was next to Ayesha in ranking of knowledge. She is known to have memorized highest number of ahadith after Aysha R.A. as Muhammad bin Sa’d said: “In comparison to Aysha and Umm e salama no one had more knowledge about Hadith.”⁽¹³⁾

She is known to have memorized about one thousand three hundred and seventy eight ahadith, out of which thirteen are mentioned in Sahihain.⁽¹⁴⁾

She had established a school at her home where art of recitation, exegesis and Hadith sciences were taught. A well-known Tabi’ee Hassan al Basari mother had also been under guidance.⁽¹⁵⁾

She was a teacher of many reputed Sahaba R.A and Tabi’een at her home. A great number of Sahaba; men and women show the love and quest of knowledge on side of women. And point to be noted is that nothing hindered them. There were no impediments for women in the quest of knowledge.

Imam Zahabi acknowledges her specialty in jurisprudence as notes:

“Among Sahaba R.A, those who were Fuqaha (Jurists), she (Umm-e-Salam) is also enlisted.”⁽¹⁶⁾

This shows versatility of her knowledge.

Dr. shamim Hyder summarizes the intellectual and educational contribution of the family of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in the following words:

“Hazrat Ayesha’s home was largest center of women education. Hazrat Fatima R.A was wel-versed in ilm ul Aroodh and in the art of writing. Hazrat Fatima daughters; Hazrat Zainab and Hazrat Umm-e-kalthum and granddaughters; Sakeena and Fatima were well-known scholars.”⁽¹⁷⁾

At the dawn of Islam, literacy ratio was extremely down. Very few persons knew how to read and write. Among the wives of the Holly Prophet S.A.W Syeda Ayesha R.A and Umm-e-Kulthum had the ability of only reading, while in Sahaba’s wives, Shifa bint Abdullah, Maryam bint Miqdaad and Ayesha bint Saeed had some knowledge of reading.⁽¹⁸⁾

3: Educational Services of Wives of Sahaba R.A

It seems suitable to mention that women-at the dawn of Islam- have contributed to the domain of education as much as men did. History endorses those services made by Sahabiat in a very clear way.

Syed Jalal uddin Rumi acknowledging the worthy contribution and input of women in education in the beginning of Islam says:

“As knowledge spread among men in this phase, it was common among women too. Among sahaba R.A, there were scores of women who knew Quran and Hadith. Even in the most difficult field of giving verdicts on certain issues, women participated actively, side by side with men.”⁽¹⁹⁾

Syeda Ayesha R.A, the teacher of thousands of men and women companions of the holy prophet S.A.W recognizes the desire and love of Ansar’s women for learning as:

“Ansar women were also well-versed. In understanding the real message of religion (Deen) shame and modesty was no barrier for them.”⁽²⁰⁾

Although Friday and Eid prayers were not mandatory upon women to offer with men in mosque, nevertheless many women would offer their prayers in mosque. That was the best time for many of women companion to memorise Quran while listening to the sweet prophetic voice S.A.W. and it is recorded that many of them had successfully memorized many chapters of Quran which shows their love and devotion for the revealed source of knowledge.

Woman at that time was not a weaker gender. She always proved her capabilities of doing hard and sensitive tasks.

Umm e Waraqah was one of the well-known Sahabiat. She is known to have participated in the collection of Quran, and that she had great recitation skills of Quran.⁽²¹⁾

Collection of Quran was highly sensitive issue even for the caliphs. The first caliph Abu Bakar R.A was hesitant to gather Quran in the form of a book.

Asma bint Amees was another great scholar. Allah almighty had gifted her with the knowledge of interpretations of dreams. The writer of Isaba notes that:

“The second caliph Umar R.A used to ask her interpretation of dreams”⁽²²⁾

It was the time when the first Islamic generation was prepared by the Prophet S.A.W and his wives R.A. All the women (Sahabiat) would actively participate in the race of learning and the superior was the one who learned more.

Ummah bint-Abdul Rahman was one of the closest students of Ayesha R.A. Owing to her intellectual depth and educational achievements many great scholars have acknowledged her contribution to education. Imam Zuhri says:

“She was an everlasting ocean of knowledge.”⁽²³⁾

Ibn-e-Habban says:

“She was the most knowledgeable lady about the narrations of Ayesha.”⁽²⁴⁾

In Hadith literature she was one of the mainstreams of Hadith content flowed from Ayesha. When the caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz took initiative for the hadith compilation, he ordered Ibn e Hazam to collect hadith narrated by Umrah bint Abdul Rehman.⁽²⁵⁾

Not only in Quran and Hadith, women also have participated in poetry and literature. Khansaa, Aatika bint Zaid, Hind bint Harith Ruqayya, and Umm-i0 Ayman are some names who got fame in poetry. Khansaa is the one whose Dewan is available and taught in universities. Her poetry is considered as the masterpiece of that period. The writer of Usud ul Ghaabah remembers her in the following words: “Scholars of poetry and literature had accepted that there was no poetess like Khansaa; neither before nor after her”⁽²⁶⁾

Conclusions:

1. Islam had encouraged women equally to get educated and participate in research in different domains of knowledge.
2. Women had contributed matchlessly to the domain of education at the dawn of Islam.
3. Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Medicine and Poetry had been the main areas women contributed to.
4. Shame and shy was not an impediment for them in the quest of knowledge.
5. Many schools were opened for new learners under the supervision of Wives of the Prophet S.A.W and wives of the companions. R.A.
6. Many great commentators of Quran, Hadith and jurisprudence had been students of women; mainly the wives of the Prophet S.A.W and the companions.
7. In the modern era, women should have profound interest in education and should keep participating in different activities that add to the nourishment and development of our society, keeping in mind the illustrious contribution of women at the dawn of Islam as a guide for them.

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