

ISLAM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS OF EDUCATION: MANDATORY OR FORBIDDEN

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Abstract

Women have been subjected to marginalization and various kinds of discrimination since ancient times, including the right of education. It was only in the late 20th century that women were allowed formal education. However, in today's world, many rights given to women by Islam are still denied, including education. The famous hadith "acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims" makes it clear that education in Islam is equally important, irrespective of the sex. However, in many other religions and cultures, there is this misconception that Islam restricts women education and many other rights. This paper will use the two authentic sources (Quran and Hadith) to review status of women education in particular and women rights in general to shed light on this controversial issue. This study will probe into the reasons behind interpretations of Islamic teachings in this context. It concludes that Islam doesn't restrict women from getting education. It will also briefly explore the current situation of women education in Pakistan, and presents ways to improve their education standards.

Keywords: *Women; Islam; education; Pakistan*

Introduction

In the recent past, schools are attacked by extremist; especially, in the case of girl's schools. The extremist groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Taliban in Afghanistan in Pakistan have increased. Targeting girls' schools and education imitated by the thoughts that education in west and

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the notion of gender equality are threats to Islamic philosophy and act of education (Human Rights Watch 2016; Walsh 2012). Such incidents have started whether religions have a role in the equalities among the gender and what is the status of Islam in permitting girls for getting education (Dixon 2016; Walsh 2012). The view is further strengthened by research that shows the lower level of women education in Muslims' countries. It is also observed that enrollment in higher education is lower when compared with the countries, where they strictly followed Islamic rules (Rahman, 2012).

Research about the status of Muslim female education across countries in the past has been dependent on cross-national analyses. It revealed that the status of women education cannot be differentiated on the basis of religions (e.g., Feldmann 2016; Østby, Urdal, & Rudolfson, 2016). The countries where Muslims in minority and diverse in terms of religions largely misses this thought, especially where Muslim population is larger than other religions, such as in India. This reason that description of educational attainment is not available between Muslims and other religious groups in the world. Islam's influence is sometimes mistaken with conservative laws for accessing education and family attitudes imposed by the state in the name of Islam. Although there is change regarding increasing female educational participation in the states like Saudi Arabia etc., having strict laws regarding dressing and mobility of women. Despite this, the enrollment in colleges and universities increases (Gorney 2016; Paschyn 2014). Very little is known about the exact scenario regarding comparison of Muslim female education and other religions/cultures.

One study showed that gender gaps in enrollment at different levels of education has largely been affected by religion than other factors like democracy and political factors (Cooray & Partake, 2011). Muslims are considered conservative in gender talk and in sexual attitude. It has been observed in present and near past (Fish 2002; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). These conservative norms restrict Muslims women getting enrolled in educational institutes. The young age girls are expected to be the care-takers of house as wives and mothers. This is a way that families are not quite interested in investing in their girl's education. This exhibits where financial and opportunities of getting education are higher than economic returns (Lehrer 1999). Arab and non-Arab Muslims are the notable variations regarding women's education and attainment of higher educational institutions. It says that Islam does not have pattern in uniform and effect in this regard (Rahman 2012; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007). For instance, a notable gap was identified regarding gender gap in education between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon (Hajj and Panizza, 2009).

Religion and Religiosity, not Islam

If we focus on the plight of women, specifically, in ancient times, philosophers held obscene notions such as does women have souls too? If yes is it humanly or that of an animal. This attitude has made the females suffer for centuries. This process of taking power over has been exercised in the forms of Sati, Hitobashira, Karo-Kari etc. All societies, including some Muslims practice this hegemony in various forms such as denial to education, in jobs, salary inequalities in the workplace and forced marriages.

Women were treated like animals and mostly as objects only for the sexual gratification of men. In ancient and medieval times, European women were mostly denied the rights of education. The famous literary figure of English literature Milton famously said “One tongue is enough for a woman”. It should be noted that it was the time when mostly Greek and other languages were a norm to be taught in good schools, but women were not considered worthy of such learning. After industrial revolution in 18th century, the situation took the turn for the worse, where women were forced to work outside and also serve as objects to satisfy the lust of employers and bosses. After 1st world war, when most men were killed, women were left with no option but to work in factories to earn bread not only for themselves but for their families. It is part of the history that most of such women were facing severe forms of sexual harassment because they had no laws to protect them. They were also paid less wages as compared to men, and this debate is still going on in Europe where women still are underpaid as compared to men, besides facing under representation in major fields as well. It was Islam that raised the status of women to the extent that paradise was placed under the feet of a mother.

Reality Check

Acquisition of knowledge and its use in one’s life has a high rank in Islam. It is fundamental for all Muslims to get knowledge and act accordingly. There are specified and distinct verses in the Holy Quran, which depict the importance and significance of knowledge in Islam. It is obligatory for both men and women that fulfill the divine requirements and worldly matters of human beings.

It has been observed that Muslim women are less educated than women belong to other religions. It is the case of sub-Saharan Africa. The ratio of women illiteracy figured as two-third has no formal schooling. It is specially the case in the age range of 25 to 34 years old. The women literacy and participation in education in other regions is at catching position with other religious groups.

Methodology

This study employed critical theory with a focus on Islamic framework to analyze verses from Quran and hadith and literature. The review of literature is about the stance of Islam on women education and the reasons behind the distorted view of Islamic teachings in this regard. Also, the study viewed the current situation of women education in the light of above discussion.

Results and Discussion

If we look at the reasons behind these discrepancies among male/female education and among Muslim non-Muslim female education respectively, and the distorted views about women education which are prevalent not only in the non-Muslim world but also majority of the Muslims are also suffering from the same doubtful notions, we cannot truly understand it unless we probe into the deliberate efforts of European thinkers since centuries which have been mostly successful. After the crusades, apparently wars ended but conspiracy theories never died and the British statesman William Ewart Gladstone once famously held Quran in his hands in British parliament and said as long as Egyptians have this book we can't thrive and live peacefully in Egypt. This was when they suppressed the rebellion of masses in Egypt in 1882 after their successful attempt to conquer those lands. They made sure to mould the syllabi in the educational system in such a manner that qur'anic and Islamic education was merely a conglomerate of rituals and recitations used to get blessings. They made double bind efforts to banish all the economic, societal and dynamic governance related teachings of the religion from the syllabi on one hand, and on the other, tried to inject the younger generation Muslim minds with the lethal and fabricated writings and teachings of orientalist who learnt eastern languages with the sole purpose of distorting facts. The famous book 'Orientalism' by Edward Said in this context has shed light on their centuries old planning and conspiracies in details and provided rich insights. Their main stance was that the best code of life and ethics is that of Europe, and human rights were first introduced into world as a result of French revolution and that Roman culture is behind the modern civilization and development. They tried their best to present a charismatic and fascinating picture of European culture and education and mesmerize the young minds with the falsified presentations. Much of such efforts of the west to misrepresent and manipulate everything related

A whole new genre translation studies thus, emerged where many European thinkers and philosophers learnt our languages to translate our books in order to distort the facts with fabricated stories. Occident was presented as having very low standard, no culture and always dependent on west for approval, and the west was presented as a standard. Colonial history

is in fact riddled with such examples, including their efforts in literature to depict the areas not part of the Imperial powers as having no values. They even went to the extent of trying to justify their efforts of conquering foreign lands for looting and subjugating them, and tried to brainwash the world that they did this to civilize the occident and teach them manners and develop them (which is a joke). In Egypt, along with other Muslim countries, their efforts paid off and the coming generations were void of any sense of pride, let alone knowledge about the golden Islamic era and self-esteem and looked at west for approval and thought of them as the standard. The same process was repeated in many colonies which were apparently liberated but neo-colonialism continued in the form of such efforts including manipulating the educational system. In this context, Lord Macaulay famously said, when the sub-continent was freed from their clutches after centuries of subjugation, that we will change their educational system to such an extent that they will be Asian by blood and color but English by taste, thinking and intellect. This neo colonialism is still going on in the form of media war and many other tactics. The current Muslim generation is anything but unified, or clear headed about their roots or purpose in life in light of Islam. They are confused, ashamed to be called Muslims, and have many misconceptions about religion. Majority think that in today's world, it is hard to succeed if we apply Islam to our lives as it is so out dated and nothing but a plethora of strict rules. These are all the result of successful efforts of those European thinkers and philosophers who Edward Said warned us about a long time ago. This is the reason we hear about such views from Muslim youth as Islam is a personal choice and religion and professional life aren't related and Islam and science can't work in unity etc. European history is full of such examples, where scientist and thinkers were considered as opposing Christianity and they were punished and targeted. Muslim history on the contrary, has no such examples, rather many Muslim scientists who laid the foundation of modern day optometry, mathematics and other such sciences were staunch and enlightened Muslims.

Now after shedding light on the reasons behind the current distorted views, the second part of debate is that Is Islam related to lower education levels for women? Empirical data is lacking regarding the attainment of education by religions. The study of 151 countries gave the data on educational attainment by gender and birth groups. The study findings revealed that Muslims women have less access to education attending. The figures of 41%, 36% 10% 61% were found as ratios of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhist and Jewish respectively (McClendon *et al.*, 2018)

Women and men have an equal status in Islam. They are parallel in their social and religious role, like in worship, prayer, faith, fasting, and pilgrimage, they have the same expectations for performing these actions and duties. With comparison of earlier religions of Arabs, Islam revitalize the status of women in all aspects. Islam prohibited to treat women as

second person and to deal them as inferior person. Islam allowed the women in their life choices as man. Women are empowered in marriage decisions; inheritance and they can hold their own property.

The instances are available from the life of Mohammad SAW, women given right for consultations, and also consult women in serious matters. Their opinion given the equal weightage as men. One of the cases of Umme Waraqah, she appointed as Imam for his family by Mohammad SAW. A woman in Islam is known for correction in the dowry of that time of caliph Umar. Women involved in transmitting Hadith, praying in Mosques, engaged in commercial transactions and matters, women as learners and seekers of knowledge are encouraged. A woman in the period of Caliph Umar is known for correction the rightly guided caliph on the matter of dowry.

Hazrat Ayesha (ra), the last wife of Muhammad's (SAW). She is known for her knowledge and understanding medicine, rhetoric and history. It also in the history of the Islam that women have priorly converted to Islam than theirs husbands. It is their power for independent actions. In the period of Caliph Umar, for financial matters women were appointed in Madina. After the periods of rightly guided caliph, the active role was also observed in Sufi time. Women were engaged in teaching, known then as spiritual mothers. In Islam, no woman received religious titles. Although many women held political power, the cases can be seen the women in Islam rule independently or with their husbands and fathers. Three Abbasid caliphs governed the state of Khayzuran. Among these three two were females. Malika Asma and Malika Arwabint Ahmad both ruled Yemen in the eleventh century. Like number of examples covered Muslim history to show the role and duties of women in Islam.

In the current period of Islam, the women status and role has been changed while the change status has not confirmed by Quran. Mostly, it is according to the prevailing norms of the culture. This results in ambiguity in improvement women status in modern time.

Debates continue over the participation of female in the society. They are reformers and conserving elements of the norm and values of the society. As they maintain family, so they perform this task at appropriate level. It's not only limited to the family level but used as a means for national identity. From 20th century and onward Muslims states promoted education for both genders. Educated girls and boys are to means for economic development. In these situations, the governments emphasize on equal access to the educational institutions of male and female. The low participation in education is higher in developing countries with rapid population growth.

The participation of women can be seen in different organizations. They are linked with developmental projects. Economics, education, health and politics are the field that absorb large number of women. Women served these organizations parallel to their male colleagues.

Women today, can be seen in different organization performing. They are active. Their roles in society as participants in grassroots organizations. Development projects in economy, education, health, and political projects; relief efforts; charitable associations; and social services are the grassroots level organization, where women can be seen in active participation. Modern reforms allowed female to enjoy their basic rights of divorce, marriage right, after divorced the man became bound to provide home shelter to the women while children in her custody.

Besides this the guardians are abided to take consensus of the girls on marriage decisions, and allowed women in the marriage contract to write clauses in the document that limit the husband's authority over them. The arrival of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (PBUH) in Arabs at a time when the society is formed by different sects and groups of the people. Each group has their own rules to treat girls in an abhorrent way. In all other matter's education was the prime aspect. This article besides discussing other aspects of education in pre- and post-modern era in Muslims, the current situation of female education and factors hindering female in the field of education in Islam. It is proved in the light of Quranic verses, Hadith and Sunnah along with offering a short glimpse of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW) wives' level of education.

Reference of the Holy Quran.

“Read in the name of your Lord who created, created man from a clinging form. Read! Your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by means of the pen; taught man what he did not know.” [96:1-5]

The first revealed line of started from the word ‘read’. It addresses the mankind to seek knowledge. The above verses regarding acquisition of knowledge surpasses that Islam denying girls education.

In another place in the Quran, Allah says:

“(This is) a Book (the Quran) which We have sent down to you, full of blessings that they may ponder over its Verses, and that men of understanding may remember” [38:29]

In the above verse the word ‘men’ is used to address the humanity. It repeatedly occurs in the Quran when Allah addresses all humans. The above verse informed men and women that critical thinking is the obligatory function of them. Quran in repeatedly manner reminds people to think and analyze. In this process of understanding, thinking and analyzing male and female has parallel approaches.

Let us now examine some hadith, authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

“Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim.”

“He who has a slave-girl and teaches her good manners and improves her education and then manumits and marries her,

will get a double reward; and any slave who observes God's right and his master's right will get a double reward."

Attaining knowledge in Islam reward in different ways. For example, the path towards knowledge and education is considered as the path of paradise. Angels treat the person who are in searching of knowledge distinctively by lowering down their wings and keep person in it. All the creations on the earth and heavens and fishes in the water praying for them to succeeded in in getting knowledge. The place of learned man on other persons is like full bright moon in comparisons of other stars in the sky. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave neither dinar nor dirham, leaving only knowledge, and he who takes it takes an abundant portion." (emphasis added)

The above Hadith, three themes regarding education emerged. First that getting education is considered as responsibility of every Muslim, it's not just a right that one has to give others but the person should struggle for education as their duty. Second Hadith emphasizes on the female and slave education. Likewise, the third Hadith showed the importance of education that a person is superior having education and knowledge than the person he has no education.

Islam given high rank to women education. Muslim women in the history were knowledgably and had distinct status on the basis of their knowledge and understanding. Following is the details regarding the two wives of Hazrat Mohammad (PBUH): Khadija (RA) and Ayesha (RA)

Khadijah Binte Khuwaylid was the first wife of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She was a wealthy tradeswoman woman in Mecca at the time. She engaged in export business. Her goods exported throughout the country and out of the country. Several males worked under her supervision. She has a high level of understanding and professional knowledge besides freedom to choose an active professional life.

Aishah Binte Abu Bakr was the youngest wife of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). She was very talented and famous for teaching Hadith to scholars. Her memory is incredible. She has a full command on the knowledge of Hadith. She narrated more than two thousand of Hadith. She is intelligent. Her intelligence in judgement and for quick decisions was tremendous. Her life shows that a woman can be a scholar, exert influence over men and women and provide them with inspiration and leadership. The example of Aishah (RA) in promoting education as a hallmark in female education in Islam. Particularly women education in the fields of laws and teachings of Islam.

In the light of the above discussion, it is clear that Islam promotes education particularly for girls. In the span of twenty-three years, during the Prophet (PBUH) society seen great transformation from anarchy and hegemony into knowledgeable and enlighten thinkers and philosophers.

Religion has an imminent role in determining the educational specifications besides the other factors. Differences in educational attainment of male and female is lineup with religious aspects. But in recent timings these restrictions from the society have been diminished as Muslim women make educational strides in every field of knowledge. Inside of the country and outside of the country approach for education. The significance of the article is not only it discussed the importance of education in Islam but also throw light in the past cases of Muslim women in the field of knowledge and education. Quranic verses and Hadith gave glimpses of these domains of education to unfold the efforts made by Muslims for education. Muslims due to their strong belief on education came out from darkness and ignorance. We need to actively involved in effortsto raise not only the education standards but the ratio of Muslim education irrespective of the gender if we want to compete with the west and other anti-Muslim powers and lead as Islam if truly acted upon, makes people leaders in both worlds not slaves or followers, it was revealed to free humans (both genders) of the shackles and clutches of slavery of any kind, whether its financial, personal, religious or of opinions.

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