

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF PROPHETIC METHOD IN WOMEN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic concept of education is holistic and extends beyond religious doctrines to include worldly knowledge, with a universal mandate for all Muslims, irrespective of gender, to actively pursue learning. The commitment to gender equality in Islam positions women as essential contributors to societal well-being and sustainable development. Having set this premise, the article delves into the importance of women's education within Islam, particularly drawing insights from the Prophetic instructional methods. It underscores the enduring relevance of these principles in addressing the contemporary challenges faced by Muslim women while pursuing their academic carriers. As societies evolve, Islam's guidance on women education and gender equality offers a timeless framework. In this background, this paper describes the distinctive emphasis on education in Islam, epitomized by the foundational directive "I-Q-R-A" (read).

Key Words: Islam, Women Education, Enlightenment, Gender Equality, Methodology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islam, religion followed 1.6 billion people, has historically brought the idea of unification of knowledge and knowledge for all. The preserved historical records also establish the fact that Muslim scholarship has taken a remarkable lead in dismantling the idea of binary knowledge. Under the auspices of its blessings, Muslims initiated a new epoch of scientific and practical enlightenment. The opening phrase of the Divine revelation underscores the profound importance of education, emphasizing the divine

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teaching through the use of the pen. From an Islamic perspective, the significance of women's education is paramount, acknowledging women not merely as influencers shaping the destiny of human society but as the very sun. The adornment of this sun with knowledge is seen as instrumental in fostering societal progress. Hence, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) took special measures to ensure the education of women, employing diverse methods to fulfil this noble purpose. Before delving into the Prophet's efforts to educate women, this article will briefly introduce the meaning of education and the importance of education for women in Islam.

2. MEANING OF EDUCATION IN ISLAM

In Islamic civilization, the various theories of education are based upon the Revelation. Consequently, it means that the theories regarding Islamic education are and were derived not only from the human intellect but also from divine revelation. It is from this revelation that Muslim scholars coined and expressed the purposes of Islamic education. The majority of Muslim scholars agree that the three Arabic terms express the meaning of education in the Islamic sense. Two of these terms are taken from the Qur'an and the third is derived from the hadith literature.ⁱ

The first term '*tarbiyah*', which means 'fostering growth', derives from the Qur'an and its root is '*raba*', which means to 'increase and grow'. In the Qur'an Allah 4 says:

وَأَخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيْتَنِي صَغِيرًا

*And be humble with them out of mercy, and pray, "My Lord! Be merciful to them as they raised me when I was young."*ⁱⁱ

The first term therefore indicates that Islamic education is there to nurture a person. The second term for education used in the Qur'an is '*ta'lim*' and it comes from the root word '*ilm*', which means 'knowledge'. It has been used in the Qur'an in:

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمُ هَ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۚ

*Who taught by the pen—taught humanity what they knew not.*ⁱⁱⁱ

This term specifically means the imparting of knowledge. The last term, '*ta'dib*', derives from the hadith reporting that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

أَدَّبَنِي رَبِّي فَأَحْسَنَ تَأْدِيبِي

My Lord educated "me and then made my education most excellent."^{iv}

The root of *'ta'dib'* is *adab*, which in a wider sense implies good manners and ethics.^v

Described as a societal instrument, Islamic education is intended to facilitate an individual's development into an ethical, moral, and spiritual being with a positive and healthy orientation. Throughout history, the equilibrium among the three Arabic terms for education and their respective significance has not always been consistent. At various points, the emphasis on disciplining the soul, mind, and body has been overshadowed by either solely focusing on intellectual discipline and knowledge acquisition or exclusively nurturing spiritual growth.^{vi}

3. IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Islam stands out by according significance to women, at par with men, be it in governance, worship, beliefs and societal roles. Just as knowledge illuminates the intellect and raises awareness in men, it equally sparks the intellect of women. The ideal society envisioned by Islam necessitates the empowerment of half of its population – women – with the invaluable gift of education.^{vii} This aligns with the Prophet's hadith declaring, "Acquiring knowledge is a duty on every Muslim," encompassing both genders.^{viii} The emphasis on educating and nurturing women is formidable due to their diverse roles—as daughters, embodiments of mercy; as mothers, providing sheltering shade; as spouses, offering comfort; or as compassionate sisters. Consequently, their responsibilities multiply.^{ix} Hazrat Abdullah (RA) narrates: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) proclaiming, "Anyone who imparts good manners and quality education to his daughter, bestowing upon her the rewards that Allah has granted, shall find that daughter serving as a protective shield, guarding him from the fires of hell."^x In another instance, the Prophet stated, "Three individuals merit dual rewards: one from the People of the Book who believes in his Prophet and in Muhammad; a slave who treats his master justly, and both are Allah's servants; and a man who possesses a slave girl, providing her with proper training. If he educates her well, sets her free, and then marries her, he shall be doubly rewarded."^{xi}

The Prophet consistently advised visiting delegations to return home, engage with their families, and impart teachings of Islam and religious knowledge to them. Right from the outset, the Prophet demonstrated a keen interest in the education of women. He emphasized the importance of learning the verses of *Surah Al-Baqarah*, encouraging not only the men but also the women to acquire knowledge.^{xii}

These Ahadith underscore the Prophet's emphasis on the education and training of women, elucidating the associated rewards. It is noteworthy that the Prophet's directives for acquiring knowledge applied to both men and women alike. For instance, the prisoners of war from the Battle of Badr were granted freedom on the condition that

they would assume the responsibilities of teaching Muslim children, irrespective of gender. Furthermore, in highlighting the significance of women's education, the Prophet specified, in the dowry arrangements for a learned young bride that the husband should provide her with the invaluable gift of education.

4. PROPHETIC APPROACH TOWARDS TEACHING

As we delve into the instructional approach of the revered Prophet Muhammad, it becomes evident that his teaching was all-encompassing and consistently expansive. Whether within the sanctified precincts of the Prophet's Mosque, the intimate spaces of his household, on a journey or within the city, amid the rigors of the battlefield or the hustle of a commercial centre, whether engaging with elders or conversing with the young, addressing women or men, be they acquaintances or strangers—his teachings, insights, and wisdom was universally beneficial. Across twenty-four hours of each day, every action undertaken by him bore educational significance. Each utterance from him was laden with precious gems of knowledge and wisdom. In the vast expanse of the cosmos, there exists no teacher comparable to him, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, who, in any circumstance or location, unfailingly imparts pearls of educational excellence.^{xiii}

5. THE PROPHET'S VISION FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION

The methods adopted by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for the education of women are discussed below:

5.1 THE PROPHET'S INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION FROM HIS HOME

Prophet Muhammad initiated the education of women starting from his household. Ayesha Siddiqah, his wife, emerged as a prominent scholar in various fields such as Hadith, Jurisprudence, *Tafsir* (exegesis of the Qur'an) and poetry, all under the guidance of the Prophet. A remarkable 2210 *Abadith* or narrations are attributed to her in the books of hadith. In comparison, among men, only Hazrat Abu Huraira, Hazrat Abdullah bin Umar, and Hazrat Anas bin Malik have narrated more hadiths than her.^{xiv}

The Prophet extended the scope of education to his other wives as well. Notably, 76 hadiths were narrated by Hazrat Umm Salamah and 65 by Hazrat Umm Habiba, demonstrating their engagement in the transmission of knowledge. In a specific incident, it is recorded that Hazrat Hafsa, another wife of the Prophet, pursued

education under the guidance and permission of the Prophet. She learned from a relative named Shifa bint Abdullah, who was well-versed in various subjects.^{xv}

There is an event mentioned in the hadiths where the Prophet encouraged the teaching of practical skills along with academic knowledge. When Hazrat Hafsa was being instructed by Shifa bint Abdullah, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) intervened and suggested, “Teach Hafsa how to treat epilepsy, just as you taught her how to read and write.”^{xvi} This highlights the Prophet’s emphasis on a holistic education that encompasses both theoretical knowledge and practical skills for women. Ibn Hazm Al-Andalusi, in his work notes that among the Companions, there were at least twenty distinguished women who served as juriconsults or jurisprudents. In the time of the Rashidun Caliphate, specific schools were established for women, where esteemed figures such as Hazrat Aisha and Hazrat Hafsa were instructors. It was common for men to seek guidance from their schools by presenting their queries and problems.^{xvii}

5.2 THE HOLY PROPHET ﷺ DESIGNATED A WEEKLY DAY SPECIFICALLY FOR WOMEN’S EDUCATION

During the era of Prophet Muhammad, educational activities were concentrated in key locations such as Dar Arqam in Makkah, Sufa and Masjid Quba in Madinah. These places served as centres for men’s education, where they received regular instruction. However, recognizing the importance of women’s education, the Prophet Muhammad designated one specific day each week exclusively for women’s education.^{xviii} In response to the request from women, as narrated by Hazrat Abu Saeed Khudri, the Prophet set aside a day dedicated to addressing issues specific to women. On this appointed day, women would gather in his presence, seeking guidance on various daily issues.^{xix} The Prophet would offer advice, share divine commandments, and provide solutions to their concerns. This weekly session became a valuable opportunity for women to receive instruction directly from the Prophet and address their daily challenges.

5.3 ADDRESS TO WOMEN AFTER *Eid* PRAYERS

Following the Eid prayer, Prophet Muhammad would address men and women separately. On one occasion, during *Eid al-Fitr*, when a substantial gathering of Companions was present, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) approached the women's assembly and delivered an impactful sermon, urging them to engage in acts of charity. His encouragement was so effective that the women willingly

donated gold and silver rings and bracelets. According to Ibn Abbas, the Prophet departed for Eid prayer without performing the customary two *rakats* before it. In the presence of Bilal, he motivated the women to be truthful, leading them to contribute generously, resulting in a substantial collection of wealth for charitable causes.^{xx} In another narration, that Ibn Abbas, (R.A.), recounted an instance where he was in attendance as the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, delivered the sermon after performing the Eid prayer. Initially, the Prophet prayed before delivering the sermon. However, realizing that his voice did not reach the women, he approached them with Bilal (R.A.) by his side that was present, spreading his clothes. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) addressed the women, emphasizing the importance of charity. The women responded by contributing their charitable donations to Bilal's clothes. One narrator gestured to his ears and throat while narrating this incident.^{xxi}

5.4 MENSTRUATING WOMEN ADVISED TO ATTEND *Eid* SERMON

Menstruating women are encouraged to engage in religious learning, as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad's emphasis on the spiritual education of women. It is advised that even if they cannot join the Eid prayer, women undergoing menstruation should still listen to the Eid sermon. Sayyida Hafsa narrates that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) recommended that young, veiled, and menstruating women should attend the Eidgah, participate in virtuous actions, and witness the prayers of the Muslim community. However, during menstruation, they should refrain from offering the prayer.^{xxii}

In another narration, during the era of the Prophet there was an instruction for virgin girls to attend the Eid gathering on the day of Eid. Even menstruating women participated while veiled. All of them stood behind the men, joining in the *takbir* (proclamation of God's greatness) and prayers. They engaged in these actions with the aspiration of receiving the blessings and purity associated with that special day.^{xxiii}

5.5 WOMEN PERMITTED TO ENGAGE IN QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSIONS

Women were permitted to engage in question-and-answer sessions during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet responded to the queries of his Companions with kindness instead of criticizing them, promoting a culture of learning.^{xxiv} There is a tradition mentioning Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, who, upon hearing something

unfamiliar, would seek clarification until she understood it. In one instance, the Prophet mentioned the accountability that leads to punishment. Aisha, upon hearing this, referred to Allah's statement about an easy reckoning. The Prophet explained that the mention of accountability was about appearing in the court of Allah, thus correcting any misunderstandings.^{xxv}

6. THE MORAL EDUCATION OF WOMEN

Whenever there was an opportunity, the Prophet Muhammad consistently imparted moral education to His wives and other women. Ayesha, in particular, took on the responsibility of teaching and instilling moral values in the women among *Aṣṣṭawaj Mutaharat* (Noble wives of the Prophet). She aimed to continue enlightening women with moral education and the teachings of the Prophet even after his departure.^{xxvi}

There is an account where Hazrat Aisha was discussing the state of a woman with the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In the course of the conversation, Aisha referred to the woman as being short in stature. In response, he promptly corrected Aisha, saying, "Aisha, this is also a form of backbiting." These instances underscore the significance of women's education and reveal the wisdom behind employing diverse teaching methods for women, elucidating the benefits derived from such approaches.^{xxvii}

7. CONTEMPORARY DEMANDS OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION

In contemporary times, despite the presence of numerous educational institutions and diverse sources for religious education, there is a notable reluctance towards religious learning that has reached an extreme level. This is surprisingly noteworthy in a religion that declares religious education as a duty for both men and women. The religion, which holds knowledge and wisdom in high esteem, presents the Qur'an, a profound book that begins with the word "*Iqra*," meaning Read, which is a prerequisite to achieve knowledge and education.^{xxviii}

Paradoxically, followers of this religion find themselves lagging behind in the realm of religious education today. Muslim scholars observe the educational landscape in the world, especially focusing on women's education, and note that while there is a proliferation of higher education centres including universities, their primary focus seems to deviate from nurturing genuine knowledge and spirituality. Scholars point out that the numerous universities in the Muslim world both public and private, are seemingly more aligned with commercialization of education and the propagation of Western secular liberalism values. They raise critical questions about this approach in the

present age and they prompt, by reflect on whether Muslims should follow these educational instructions, what their relevance is today, and what their requirements are in the contemporary era.^{xxix}

7.1 THE EDUCATION SYSTEM SHOULD BE BENEFICIAL FOR THIS WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER

Initially, there is a need for an integrated educational framework rooted in the principles of *Sa'adah al-Darain*, a system that harmoniously incorporates both religious and worldly knowledge. In contemporary society, there exists a dichotomy between education and its systems, with a prevalent belief that science, technology, and modern sciences are detached from religious teachings. Some argue that religion solely pertains to matters of faith and not to worldly affairs. However, from the inception of Islam, the religion has encouraged individuals to ponder, contemplate, and engage in research and exploration. These intellectual pursuits are seen as interconnected with the guidance provided by the Qur'an and Sunnah.^{xxx}

In addition to excelling in modern sciences, individuals have gained global recognition, and both men and women have actively participated in this progress. In the past, Muslims' educational system was characterized by unity and coherence. The traditional *Dars-e-Nizami* curriculum, prevalent during the medieval era, served as the singular system for education, cultural development, and mental training in the country. This system not only produced scholars in hadith and jurisprudence but also trained individuals for civil service and administrative roles. Presently, there is a need for a comprehensive system that caters not only to men but also to the educational needs of women. This system should provide practical training for success not only in this world but also in the hereafter.^{xxxi}

7.2 EDUCATION AS A FOUNDATION FOR CHARACTER BUILDING

Character development is crucial in education, as it plays a pivotal role in fulfilling the true purpose of learning. A strong character, particularly in women, can lead to effective teaching, contribute to family cohesion, and transform public spaces into places of virtue. Muhammad Iqbal aptly expressed the impact of maternal influence on one's nature, emphasizing the profound role of women in nurturing and shaping individuals.^{xxxii}

In this context, the educational system should prioritize character-building alongside academic knowledge. This approach aligns with the idea that education goes beyond being a mere goal in itself; rather, it is a means to achieve broader objectives. According to this

perspective, the ultimate goal of Islamic education is not just securing a livelihood but acquiring moral wealth as well.^{xxxiii} Within the context of Islamic education, the focus extends beyond the conventional pursuit of livelihood. Instead, it places a distinctive emphasis on the accumulation of wealth. Here, 'wealth' implies not only material prosperity but also encompasses intellectual, moral, and spiritual richness. This particular orientation sets Islamic education apart by prioritizing holistic development over the narrow pursuit of mere sustenance.^{xxxiv}

7.3 UTILIZATION OF MODERN RESEARCH

The utilization of contemporary research is imperative in the context of Islamic education, as the system is not static but rather an evolving process open to improvement and reform. The outcomes of educational research conducted worldwide should be assessed and applied. Every piece of wisdom serves as our foundation, and we should be open to embrace without hesitation. Action without research is futile, as emphasized by Shaykh Saadi, who encourages self-inspiration for knowledge acquisition. Women aspiring to pursue studies in various fields and engage in research deserve adequate opportunities and recognition. By rewarding their efforts, they can become exemplary figures, inspiring other women in the process.^{xxxv}

7.4 SPECIAL FOCUS ON PRACTICAL TRAINING OF WOMEN

In contemporary times, the education of women necessitates a focused approach towards preparing them for active participation in practical life while adhering to Islamic boundaries. It is crucial that women not only embody Islamic values in their character, attire, morals, and demeanour but also serve as exemplary individuals. Their lives should exemplify the responsibilities bestowed upon them by Allah, particularly in nurturing the human race and imparting education in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah.^{xxxvi}

The progress of the Muslim Ummah significantly relies on the contributions of women. Unless they contribute by producing morally upright and competent individuals, the nation cannot advance. Muslim Sajjad, underscores the significance of women's education in Islamic society. He highlights that various sources, including Qur'anic verses, the Prophet's sayings, the practices of his companions, societal interactions, and historical evidence, collectively emphasize the importance of educating women. Depriving women of education is seen as detrimental to humanity, a stance that Islam cannot endorse.^{xxxvii}

7.5 EDUCATING WOMEN ACCORDING TO MODERN REQUIREMENTS

In the contemporary era, various countries are grappling with disparities in the modern education of women. Discrepancies exist where women excel in technical, medical, and engineering fields in some regions, while in others, they lag behind in educational pursuits. In our own country, women actively participate in medical, political, economic, and social activities, even contributing to ambitious ventures such as space exploration. However, there are still areas, particularly tribal regions, where girls are deprived from education.^{xxxviii}

Certain individuals hold misguided beliefs, viewing investments in girls' education as unnecessary, presuming that a woman's role is confined to managing the household. It is crucial in our society for parents to recognize the responsibility of educating girls and fostering confidence in them. This empowerment enables them to skilfully manage their homes and families. It is imperative to assess our circumstances today, in the light of the Islamic teachings as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) emphasized the duty of educating both men and women.^{xxxix}

8. CONCLUSION

The emphasis on education for women within Islam is founded on the acknowledgment of their pivotal role in shaping, making, and advancing society. Qura'nic directives and the actions of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) underscore that the pursuit of education is not merely a right but a shared duty for both men and women. In today's global landscape, where gender equality and women empowerment are recognized as integral components of societal advancement, the teachings of Islam pertaining to women's education assume particular significance. Empowering women through education serves as a mechanism to unlock their potential, contribute to societal development, and cultivate a more equitable and enlightened community. The Prophet's historical initiatives to ensure women's education offer a timeless framework for societies aspiring towards inclusivity and progress.

Furthermore, the inherent message of education in Islam extends beyond the acquisition of academic knowledge; it encompasses moral values, compassion, and a sense of responsibility. Educated women, within the Islamic context, are envisioned as luminaries contributing to the intellectual, moral, and social tapestry of their communities. Therefore, advocacy for women' transcends individual empowerment, representing a collective investment in the holistic betterment of society. Recognizing the contemporary relevance of women's education within the Islamic framework allows societies to bridge the gap between tradition and progress, fostering a more inclusive and enlightened future.

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