

## **Women Education: Islamic Dogma**

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### **Abstract:**

Islam is popularly known as a religion. It is not only a religion but also a complete philosophy of life that is why it is called '*Deen*' (Qur'an, 3:19). Islam does not only talk about worshipping one God and offering prayers but it tells each and every thing related to life. The status of women in society is neither a new issue nor is it a fully settled one. For many people oppressed, inferior, and unequal, weak etc. are the words that first words that come to mind when thinking about women in Islam. These stereotypes confuse Islam with cultural practices and fail to recognize that Islam has empowered women with the most progressive rights since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In Islam, women are not inferior or unequal to men. Islam places great stress on seeking knowledge and education. Generally speaking, one can't find the proper right path in this world without education; this is true in all times and places. In fact, Islam called upon seeking out knowledge on all the levels. The first word of the Qur'an, revealed by God to Prophet Muhammad was *Iqra* meaning 'read' (Qur'an, 96:1) which highlights the importance of science and learning. The second revelation talked about God who teaches the people by the 'pen' (Qur'an, 96:4). Qur'an encourages the pursuit of knowledge by all Muslims regardless of their sex. Prophet Muhammad said: whoever follows a path seeking knowledge, God will make his path to paradise easy. In either case no gender is advocated, the order is for everyone. Islam does not put any limit on the kind or field of education a woman may choose. This paper is intended to provide a brief and authentic exposition of what Islam stands for in this regard.

**Key words:** Islam, Education, Men, Women, Qur'an

### **Introduction:**

What is Islam? Islam is an Arabic word comes from the word '*Salm*' which means peace. The literally meaning of Islam is 'surrender of one's own will to God's will. In short, Islam means peace acquired by submitting one's will to God. Islam is popularly known as a religion. It is not only a religion but also a complete way of life that is why it is called '*Deen*' (Qur'an, 3:19). Islam does not only talk about worshipping one God and offering prayers but it tells each and every thing related to life.

It is misconception that Islam is a new religion that was formulated 1400 years ago in Arab and Prophet Muhammad was the founder of Islam. However, we may clarify that Islam is not the name of some

unique religion presented for the first time by Prophet Muhammad who should, on that account be called the founder of Islam. The Qur'an states that Islam--- the complete submission of man before his one and only Creator---is the one and only faith and way of life consistently revealed by God to humankind from the very beginning. Noah, Solomon, David, Abraham, Moses, Isaac and Jesus who appeared at different times and places, all propagated the same faith and conveyed the same message of God. And Prophet Muhammad was the last messenger of God and God revived through him the same genuine faith which had been conveyed by all His Prophets. Thus, the religion of all prophets was 'total submission of God's will' and one word for that in the Arabic is called Islam.

As an egalitarian belief system, it introduced the concepts of universal brotherhood and non-discrimination among Muslims on the ground of sex or race. Islam gave the fundamental rights and championed all movements to improve the status of women at a time when societies were overtly traditional and socially underdeveloped.

### **Area of Research:**

The area of this paper is to highlight the status and specially women education in Islam on which the common followers of Islam are still ignorant or unenlightened.

### **Objective:**

The paper would focus on following objectives:

- To discuss the status of women in Islam
- To highlight the importance of Education in Islam and
- To reflect the women right to education in Islam

### **Methodology:**

The paper is based on primary and secondary sources and the methodology is based on descriptive and analytical mode, so that the subject matter of the paper could be easily understandable for common readers.

### **Discussion:**

In order to get achieve a better insight of the status of women in Islam, it is worthwhile to preview how women were treated in previous civilizations and religions that precede Islam:

### **India:**

During the era of the Aryan civilization (2500 BC), women were accorded almost the same status as men. Women were educated, had a say in their marriage decisions and own their own properties. Even prostitutes were admired for their expertise in the art of music and dance and widows were allowed to remarry. This trend took a nose-diving turn with the start of the medieval era (1500 BC) and unfortunately resulted in practices like Sati (dying with the husband at the funeral pyre), *Jauhar* (wives immolating themselves when they realized that their husbands were going to die in enemy hands) and child marriages.

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Describing the status of the woman in India, Encyclopedia Britannica (11<sup>th</sup> ed. 1911, Vol. 28, p. 782) states: “In India, subjection was a cardinal principle. Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of dependence says Manu. The rule of inheritance was agnatic, that is descent traced through males to the exclusion of females”.

### **Rome:**

Rome was a typically male dominated society; so much so that in the Roman Republic a man could legally kill his wife or daughter if they questioned his authority. Women were also kept out of positions of power. They were not allowed to be senators, governors, lawyers, judges or any of the other official positions involved in running the Roman Empire. Women were also not allowed to vote in elections.

Ellen, E. A. was described about a Roman wife in his famous book ‘History of Civilization’ (Vol. III, p. 550) as “a babe, a minor, a ward, a person incapable of doing or acting anything according to her own individual taste, a person continually under the tutelage and guardianship of her husband”.

### **Athens:**

In the 5th century women in ancient Athenian societies were given no legal rights and were allowed to leave the house only for short distances with a chaperone. It was a common belief that women were emotional creatures who were dangerous to themselves and needed to be taken care of by men. Although women might own some personal items and have charge of a slave or two, they could not own property or enter into contracts. In Athens, women were not better off than either the Indian. “Athenian women were always minors; subject to some male- to their father, to their brother, or to some of their male kin (Ibid., p. 444). Her consent in marriage was not generally thought to be necessary and “she was obliged to submit to the wishes of her parents, and receive from them her husband and her lord, even though he were stranger to her” (Ibid., p. 443).

The status of women in society is neither a new issue and still nor is it a fully settled one. But in today’s day and age, there is a general perception that women rights reached its momentum with the start of the Women Liberation Movement of the 20th century, specifically between the 1970s-1980s. However, from the Islamic point of view, women’s liberation was not started by some radical political groups of the West, but was revealed by Allah to Prophet Muhammad in as long ago as the 7th century. The Qur'an and the Traditions (Hadis and Sunnah) of the Prophet guarantee every Muslim woman certain right and duty.

Not only family or a society but the whole of mankind is treated by Islam on an ethical basis. Differentiation in gender is neither a credit nor a drawback for the genders. Therefore, when we talk about status of woman in Islam it should not lead us to think that Islam has no specific guidelines, limitations, responsibilities and obligations for men. According to Islam, one what makes one valuable and respectable in the eyes of Creator is neither one’s prosperity, position, intelligence, physical strength nor beauty, but only one’s God-consciousness and awareness.

In the time of the darkness that engulfed the world and at that time when female children were buried alive in Arabia and women were considered transferable property, Islam honored women in society by elevating them and protecting them with unprecedented rights. Islam gave women the right to education, to marry someone of their choice, to retain their identity after marriage, to divorce, to work,

to own and sell property, to seek protection by the law, to vote, and to participate in civic and political engagement. God began to reveal the message of Islam to Prophet Muhammad, in Mecca. Prophet Muhammad called people towards the belief in one God and encouraged them to be just and merciful to one another. In reforming the pagan Arab society, he particularly transformed their mindset regarding the treatment of women. Islam abolished the practice of killing female children and raised the stature of women in society to one of dignity, esteem, and privilege. God devotes an entire chapter of the Qur'an (Qur'an:4), to women that mentioned the high status of women. In addition, God directly addresses women repeatedly throughout the Quran. Islam proclaims that all human beings, men and women, are born in a pure state. The goal of every Muslim is to preserve this purity by shunning evil tendencies and beautifying their inner being with virtuous traits.

Islam further confirms that both men and women are equal in the sight of God. In the Quran, God declares, "...Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you..." (49:13) At another place in the Quran, God clearly states that all humans are equal: "To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, we shall give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions." (16:97). In the Qur'an God frequently addresses both the man and the woman- "For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women who are patient, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in God's praise - For them all has God prepared forgiveness and great reward." (Quran, 33:35). The Qur'an also declares, "Women shall have the same rights over men as men have over them". In Islam, women are the counterparts of men. Every Islamic injunction addressed to man is also addressed to woman. The Islamic law is gender neutral. God says: 'and their Lord hath heard them (and He saith): Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost....' )Qur'an, 3:195). Likewise, numerous verses in various chapters of the Qur'an speak of the higher status of women. As per instances: chapter-2. The Cow (Bakra): verses 49, 221, 222, 228, 231, 232, 235, 236, 241, 282, Chapter-3. The Family of Imran (Al-Imran): verses 14, 41, 61, Chapter-5. The Food (Maida): verses 5, 6, Chapter-7. The Elevated Places (Araf): verses 127, 141, Chapter-9. Repentance (Towba): verses 67, 68, 71, 72, Chapter-12. Yusuf (Name of a Prophet): verses 28, 30, 50, Chapter-14. Ibrahim (Name of Prophet): verse 6, Chapter-24. The Light (Noor): verses 4, 12, 23, 26, 31, 60, and etc.

We can see in these verses of the chapters that the Qur'an clearly establishes equality between men and women although God created them with some unique physiological and psychological attributes. In Islam, these differences are embraced as vital components to a healthy family and community structure with each individual contributing their own distinctive talents to society. Normally, the man, who is stronger, works outside the house and the woman, in accordance with human nature, is primarily concerned with managing the household. Each sex complements the other; basically, there may be differences between man and woman by nature but both are equivalent in status. Both the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions elevated the status of women and gave them human, civil, social, and economic rights never previously given to women. The Muslim woman has an independent personality, equal to man in religious duties, in the right to education, in reward for her deeds as well as in defending her beliefs. She has complete independence and total control over her possessions. Islam gives the woman equal legal capacity with the trade and commerce. This means that she has the ability to enter all kinds

of contractual arrangements and to conduct business on her own without the need for her husband's consent.

The rights, roles, and responsibilities of women are evenly balanced with those of men but are not necessarily the same. As Islam has granted individual identities to men and women, a constant comparison between the two is futile. Each plays a unique role to mutually uphold social morality and societal balance.

### **Education in Islam:**

The term 'education' in Islam is understood and comprehended in totally different manner to what is understood within the western societies. As scholars explored, the general understanding of an educated individual within western societies is someone who possesses critical faculties and is perspective an educated individual might possess as being autonomous with aesthetic sensitivity. From an Islamic perspective an educated individual might possess similar attributes; however, the necessary component that is required is belief and knowledge of how to worship God and how to live life in accordance to the Islamic laws. There is no one word that describes 'education' within the Arabic language; however, scholars generally tend to use three different words---*Tarbiyah*, *Ta'dib* and *T'alim*. *Tarbiyah* comes from the root word *raba* which means-- to grow, to increase, to rear, spiritual nurturing, which implies a state of ethical and spiritual nurturing in developing the individual's potential and guidance of the child to the state of complete maturity. *Ta'dib* is derived from the root word *aduba* which suggests the social aspects of a human being including the process of character development and good social behaviour. *Ta'lim* comes from the root word of *alima* which means to know, to be informed, to perceive, to learn, to discern, this refers to knowledge, the imparting and receiving of it through instruction and teaching.

Islam places great stress on seeking knowledge and education. Generally speaking, one can't find the proper right path in this world; this is true in all times and places. The very first ayah (verses) revealed in the Qur'an Chapter No 96 is:

"Read – in the name of thy Sustainer, who has  
created man out of a germ-cell,

Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One  
who has taught (man) the use of the pen  
taught man he did not know!"

The first word of the Qur'an, revealed by God to prophet Muhammad was 'read' (iqra) which highlights the importance of science and learning. The second revelation talked about God who teaches the people by the 'pen'. Qur'an encourages the pursuit of knowledge by all Muslims.

Hazarat Muhammad was an ardent advocate of the pursuit of knowledge and education. He always encouraged the Muslims to acquire knowledge. To encourage education he declared, "The ink of a learned man is purer than the blood of a martyr". After his migration to Madinah, educational institutions were established there under his initiative. Thereafter literacy and education began to

spread rapidly among the Madinities. Madinah became the centre of religion and education. The prophet Muhammad said: seeking knowledge is a compulsory on every Muslim. He also said: whoever follows a path seeking knowledge, God will make his path to paradise easy. In Islam, education process derives its pillars from Holy Quran and Prophetic Traditions, and sayings of Companions, Followers and the opinions of pedagogy scholars. From this balanced blend, the Islamic education derived its objectives, elements, means and methods, in the context of integrated system organized by Islamic teachings. Education process in Islam is a process of building and directing individuals to reach its maturity. For this aim, messages were revealed and messengers were sent to build individuals spiritually, mentally and physically, in the light of balanced system that enables them to perform his duties. Muhammad commanded that: it is the duty of every Muslims (man and woman) to pursue knowledge throughout life, even if it should lead the seeker to China.

### **Woman education in Islam:**

Women and girls have been victims of ruthless power struggles for centuries in all societies and cultures around the world. This hegemony over women has been exercised in different forms. Sadly, but truly, many societies including some Muslim societies continue to exercise this patriarchy in different forms such as the denial to education, unequal salaries compared to men in workplaces and forced marriages among many others. Prophet Muhammad came at a time when the Arab society, like so many patriarchal societies at that time, was rife with abhorrent practices against girls. He preached Islam, liberating women and girls in every walk of life, education being a prime aspect.

The verses first revealed in the Qur'an (96:1-5) encourage the pursuit of knowledge by all Muslims regardless of their sex. In a Qur'anic society, there can never be a restriction of this knowledge to one sex. It is the duty of every Muslims (man and woman) to pursue knowledge throughout life, even if it should lead the seeker to China. The Prophet even commanded that the slave girls be educated. Lectures of the Prophet were attended by audiences of both men and women; and by the time of the Prophet's death, there were many women scholars.

### **Conclusion:**

In the conclusion it can be said that despite the low status of woman in Muslim society, many scholars argue that Islamic law considerably improved the position of women. The distinction between the sexes is based on natural law and is justified in the Qur'an by the fact that the physical, biological and psychological make-up of men and women is different. Hence, God's rules apply to both genders, but in diverse ways. For example, God commanded women to cover certain parts of their body, including their hair, to preserve their modesty. Men are also required to cover parts of their body out of modesty, but not in the same way as women. Therefore, God commanded both men and women to be modest; yet, the manner in which they observe may be different.

Knowledge is very important for human activity. In fact, Islam called upon seeking out knowledge on all the levels. Education is an essential element of the empowerment of women. A good quality education, designed on the basis of women's immediate and strategic needs, builds women's capacities and prepares them to seize opportunities in the public and private domains. The empowerment of women is therefore linked to the development of the nations and the societies. It plays a vital role in the prosperity and development of the nations. Striving to empower women to make them contributing

members of the society, women should have equal opportunities to be educated, to participate in governance, to achieve economic self-sufficiency and to be protected from violence and discrimination. Islam considers women as an integral part of the society. Without education and empowerment of women, a nation cannot develop and progress in a real way. The importance of education is clear. It can be safely said that a human being is not in the proper sense till he is educated. When the Qur'an was revealed, the first word of its first verse was *Iqra* meaning read. Education is thus the starting point of every human activity.

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