

Educational Era of Muslim Women in India

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Abstract: *The women are one of the two pillars of our society. A society can be called developed only if the reinforcements for living are equally distributed to all parts of the society. Education is not also an exception. The situation of women's in these countries is poor as the social structure. Education is also committed to empowering girls and women to improve their own lives, the lives of their families, and the conditions in their communities. It is a well-ordered system, comprising a set of universal principles and values for the socioeconomic, political, moral, intellectual and cultural guidance of humanity; in a word, 'Islam guides man in totality' or in other words, the rules of religion are applicable to life in total. The education system is one of them. In dealing with women's education from the Islamic perspective. It is recognized that wider issues pertaining to a modern Islamic curriculum have not been addressed, the later is, indeed, a crucial issue, but our concern here has been one of the key questions of principle that should surely guide current attempts to formulate an authentically Islamic education system, namely the approach to women's education in such a system.*

Keywords: *Education of Muslim women in Islam, Mughal period, British period, Before independence, After independence.*

Introduction:

On the completion of five decades of independence women in Muslim communities face considerable challenges as citizens of India as members of India's largest minority. As reported by Mishra, L.K. (2004), today Muslims at 13.4 percent of the population are India's largest minority. After Indonesia, India has the second largest Muslim population in the world. More than half of the entire Muslim population lives in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. In no state or Union Territories (with the exception of Jammu and Kashmir and the Union Territory of Lakshadweep), do Muslims form a majority. The states where the Muslim population is five percent or less are Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab and Tamil Nadu. Generally speaking a large proportion of Muslims live in urban areas. According to an anthropological survey of India over 350 regional or ethno-linguistic Muslim groups exist in India (Khalidi, 1995, p.2). A majority of Indian Muslims are Sunni, existing mainly in Northern India. Approximately 10-15 percent of Indian Muslims are Shias (Hasnani and Sheikh, 1988; Reported in Kazi, 1999). Cultural diversity among Muslims, including attitudes, habits, languages, tradition and non-uniform diffusion of Islam over the centuries has resulted in a variety of Muslim laws and customary practices within Muslim communities in India.

Objectives of the study:

- to trace the history of the education of Muslim women,
- to describe progress of Muslim women
- to identify hurdles in the progress of education of Muslim women,

Sources of Data

The secondary source of present study are census report, Government policies, report of committee and commissions appointed by Government of India, article from magazine and Journals and Internet sources etc. were consulted as a secondary source of data.

Education of Muslim Women in Islam:

In pre-Islamic Arabia discrimination against women began with their birth in the form of female infanticide. The Arabs in Jahiliyat used to bury their daughter alive. The motives behind this barbaric custom of burying female infant were twofold: The fear that an increase in female offspring would result in economic burdens, as well as the fear of the humiliation frequently caused by girls being captured by hostile tribes and subsequently preferring their captors to their parents and brothers.

But Islam prohibited the practice of female infanticide, female genital mutilation, which is another form of discrimination against women. It has no basis in Islam. Rather it is a cultural practice. However, after Islam came women are recognized by Islam as a full and equal partner of man in the procreation of humankind. He is the father, she is the mother, and both are essential for life. Her role is not less vital than his, by his partnership she has an equal share in every aspect. She is entitled to equal rights and equal responsibility in every aspect. A woman enjoys the same status and equal rights as that of man in the word of Quran you are member one of another. There is no difference between men and women concerning status, rights, and blessing both in the world and in the hereafter." Acquiring knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim" this narration applies equally to men and women.

In dealing with women's education from the Islamic perspective. It is recognized that wider issues pertaining to a modern Islamic curriculum have not been addressed, the later is, indeed, a crucial issue, but our concern here has been one of the key questions of principle that should surely guide current attempts to formulate an authentically Islamic education system, namely the approach to women's education in such a system. Long as the education system is governed by the spirit of Islam throughout, there will be a harmony between these two modes of social activity, permitting women to express themselves in accordance with their natural dispositions and to be given the respect and honour which is so central to the real social message of Islam. Knowledge and education are highly emphasized in Islam. Both are integral parts of the Islamic religion. Islam encourages its followers to enlighten themselves with the knowledge of their religion as well as other branches of knowledge. It holds the person who seeks knowledge highest esteem and has exalted his position in reality, the entire aim of the divine revelation and the sending of prophets to humankind has been stressed in the Quran as the communication of knowledge. The Book says: the

prophet recites unto people God's revelation, causes them to grow and imparts to them knowledge and wisdom. The divine desire is every believer to be well educated in religion to possess wisdom and broad intellectual knowledge, the purpose of raising a prophet in a nation

is to teach and to impart knowledge. The Quran is full of verses which praise learned people encourage original thinking and personal investigation and denounce unimaginative imitation. It also emphasizes the importance of the study of nature and its laws. According to the Quran, learning is an unending process and the entire universe is made subservient, to man the agent of God, who has to abide by the truth and not by narrow notions of hereditary customs and beliefs. The verses in the Quran which enjoin people to learn and observe nature outnumber all those related to prayer, fasting and pilgrimage put together.

In the Hadith literature, knowledge is highly appreciated and encouraged also. The Prophet Muhammad always emphasized the importance of knowledge to his followers and encouraged them to seek it. Learned people are regarded as the inheritors of the Prophetic wisdom. In this connection, the following Hadiths can be quoted: The Prophets leave "knowledge as their inheritance. The learned ones inherit this great fortune; search for knowledge though it be in China. Studies were conducted in the Mosques, circles of discussion (halaqat) were set up and teachers were simultaneously students learning from their superior and in their turn, teaching their own students.

Education was considered a matter of religious duty - a manifestation of the Muslim's submission to the will of Allah and an act of piety which could lead to a deeper knowledge of the creator - the one. Hence we find that all members of society participated in that process. Since education was free of charge, opportunities were available to everybody, rich or poor alike, the Prophet said treat equally poor and rich students who sit before you for the acquisition of knowledge, gifted students were helped and highly encouraged to continue their education. So that they would be

able to fully fill their aspirations.

There is no priority for men over women in relation to the right to education. Both are equally encouraged to acquire education, as already shown, from the cradle to the grave. Indeed all the Quranic verses which relate to education and which advocate the acquisition of knowledge were

directed to both men and women alike. In accordance with the all-embracing concept of *Tawhid* - oneness - when Islam elevated women physically by abolishing female infanticide, it could not overlook the need for their mental and spiritual elevation. By contrast, Islam would view the neglect of these dimensions as virtually tantamount to murdering their personality. The Quran says: "they are losers who besottedly have slain their children by keeping them in ignorance. Neither the Quran nor the saying of the Prophet prohibit or prevent women from seeking

knowledge and having an education.

Prophet was the forerunner in this regard in declaring that seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman. By making such a statement, the Prophet opened all the avenues of knowledge for men and women alike. So, like her male counterpart, each woman is under a moral and religious obligation to seek knowledge, develop her intellect, broaden her outlook, cultivate her talents and then utilize her potential to the benefit of her talents and then utilize her potential to the

benefit of her soul and of her society. The interest of the Prophet in female education was manifest in the fact that he himself used to teach the women along with the men he also instructed his followers to educate not only their women but their slave girls as well. The following Hadith puts it thus: a man who educates his slave girl frees her and then marries her. This man will have a double reward. The wives of the Prophet, especially Aisha not only taught women, they taught men also and many of the Prophet's companions and followers learned the Quran. Hadith and

Islamic Jurisprudence from Aisha.

There was no limitation placed on women's education. Women were allowed to learn all the branches of Science. She was free to choose any field of knowledge which interested her. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that, because Islam recognized that women are in principle wives and mothers. They should also place special emphasis on seeking knowledge in those branches which could help them in those particular spheres. In accordance with the dictates of the Quran and the Hadith encouraging women to develop all aspects of their personality. It was believed that an educated Muslim woman should not only radiate her moral qualities in the environment of her home, but she should also have an active role in the broad fields of social, economic and political development.

The Quran in particular commands men and women to perform their prayers, pay their poor tax and enjoin good and forbid evil in all forms: social, economic and political. This means that both have an equal duty to accomplish these tasks. In order to do so, they must have equal access to educational opportunities. For how can a woman uphold good social and economic politics or disapprove them if she is intellectually not equipped for the task? Following the injunctions of the Quran and the Sunnah concerning female education early Muslim women seized this

opportunities and laboured to equip themselves in all branches of the knowledge of then time. They attended classes with men. They participated in all cultural activities side by side with them and managed to win their encouragement and respect. Early Islamic history is replete with examples of Muslim women who showed a remarkable ability to complete with men and excelled them on many occasions.

Education of Muslim Women in Mughal Period:

During the period of Muslim rule the birth of a girl was looked upon as an unfortunate and unpleasant event in the Muslim family. Early marriage at the age of 8 or 9 became a common practice during this period. As regards the settlement of marriage, it was entirely the concern

of the parents on both sides, who agreed to the conditions of the contract and fixed the date of marriage. At that time girls were not allowed to express their opinion regarding their marriage, made the consent of the bridegroom and bride absolutely necessary for marriage. The Muslim

rulers of India generally took a keen interest in education, and many of them founded schools, colleges and libraries in various places in their dominions. The example of rulers was followed by many of their influential subjects, scholars, poets and other literary men were often encouraged by the patronage of the courts or of private individuals.

Stipends and scholarships were often given to pupils and in many places orphanages were established. The permanent settlement of Muslim in India, and conversion of some of the inhabitants to Islam, meant the establishment of mosques, and as in other Muslim countries, the mosques, especially in towns, was a centre of instruction and of literary activities. Muslim educational institutions are distinguished as

maktabs or madrasas, the maktab, is a primary school often attached to a mosque, the chief business of which is to instruct boys in those portions of the Koran which a Muslim is expected to know by heart in order to perform his devotions and other religious functions. Sometimes instruction in reading, writing and simple arithmetic (3 R's) was also included in the curriculum. Primary education was also carried on in private houses, Madrasas were school for higher learning. They too were generally attached to mosques and monasteries, some of them rise to the status of universities. The course included grammar, rhetoric, logic, theology, metaphysics, literature, jurisprudence and science. Certain subjects were more cultivated in some centres than others. The medium of instruction in these schools was person. But the study of Arabic was compulsory for Muslims. Education was confined to the royal and high class sections of the population and to some extent to the middle class. There were 'Maktabs' for imparting religious education to girls in private houses where elderly ladies taught the Quran and books on morals. Muslim widows generally regarded it to be their duty to teach young girls in their own houses. There are numerous instances of highly educated and accomplished ladies in the royal families as well in the families of nobles.

There were no maktabs and madrasas for girls throughout our medieval Indian history. Perhaps it was not considered desirable and necessary to educate the female section of population. There were, however, arrangements for the education of girls of the well-to-do and royal families." Therefore, we find many scholar women in the royal families. Among the women some become successful ruler also, like Razia Sultan, Chand Bibi, etc. Nurjahan was advisor-in-chief to her husband Jahangir.

Education of Muslim Women in British Period:

British, who had acquired supremacy over India by the beginning of the 19th century made efforts to promote women's education, Adam's Report 1838 noted the need for greater efforts towards women's education which was previously neglected by the government. By the recommendation of Wood's Despatch 1854, Education became a unified, organized programme all over the country, women's education was given a boost and several organizational, administrative, and curricular arrangements were made, consequently, in 1901-02, there were 5,628 primary schools, 467 secondary schools, and 12 colleges with total enrolment of 447,470 girls.

The Indian Education Commission 1882 made specific recommendations for the improvement of facilities for women's education. A women's committee was formed and ways were suggested to enhance the relevance of the educational curriculum for girls. Individual and collective efforts were made for the improvement of Muslim Women's status and education. Khwaja Altaf Husain Hali's novel (1905) "Chupki Daad" (voice of the silent) vividly captured the reality of women's oppression. Hali argued for female education. Mumtaz Ali and his wife Muhammadi Begum founded a newspaper "Tahzib-un-Niswan" (women's reformer) which took up the issues of female education, the age of marriage, the importance of a girl's consent to marriage, polygamy, a woman's role in marriage and purdah etc. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan urged Muslims to gain a modern secular education. His Islamic Anglo-Oriental College was later to become Aligarh Muslim University. The views of Sir Syed communicated to the Education Commission of 1882 were of great significance as far as Muslim women's education was concerned.

The Indian Education Commission of 1882, while examining the question of girls' education remarked, "Female education is still in an extremely backward condition and needs to be fostered in every legitimate way." It recommended that it should receive a larger share of public funds. As a result, state funds were spent more freely on girls' education. There was a sharp rise in private efforts also. Owing to these two factors, girls' education progressed.

The British government adopted a liberal policy for promoting girls' education. A number of schemes were started. The period after 1921 was charged with national awakening among the people as a result of the steering of the struggle for freedom by the Indian leaders, who realized that women's participation was important for social progress. There were some notable leaders including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Annie Besant and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who advocated education for women, removal of their social disabilities and restoration of their legal and social rights. Socio-economic movements like the Brahmo samaj and Arya samaj but further support to these concepts. These reform movements brought a new awakening among the women-folk and they, specially from the middle classes, were imbued with new ideas. As modern education became a torch light for them, they came out of the four walls of the homes and took active part in various social activities.

Muslim Women before Independence:

During the 20th century regional differences existed in the level of education for Muslims depending upon their socio-economic location and local needs. As mentioned by Seema Kazi in her MRG International Report that in the late 19th century, only 0.97% of Hindu girls and 0.86% of Muslim girls were attending recognized schools, and no Hindu or Muslim girls had passed the matriculation examination in either Bombay or Madras.

According to a study in 1901-02 there were 44,695 female secondary students in British India, yet in the provinces there were only four (4) Hindu girls attending secondary public schools compared to two (2) Muslim girls in 1902 placed them ahead of Hindu girls in the provinces of Bombay, Madras and the United Provinces. While they lagged behind in Bengal and Punjab.

The progress of Muslim women's educational status was not satisfactory, though rising steadily, only due to the government initiatives as well as attempts with in Muslim communities to promote female education. Seema Kazi said in her report during the period of 1916-26 the number of Muslim girls' school and their enrolment increased. A registered charity, federation was founded in 1933 to give advice on training and employment to girls and women. Its founder was a group of women interested in all aspects of women's education and employment in 1937.

The Shariat Act was passed by the Central Legislature. A subsequent legislative measure was the dissolution of Muslim marriage Bill in 1939, which had the aim of directly benefiting women. Both bills had the support of Muslim women's groups and generated public awareness of women's issues. Before independence in large network of educational institution was set up throughout the country. Centre of

higher institution were setup in various places. Education had become a matter of right during those days, as all citizens were to receive education. It was noticeable and pleasant to say that Hindu freely joined Muslim institutions and Muslims learnt Sanskrit. Historically, Muslims adopted the western system of education at a later stage than Hindus.

During the British period, educational degeneration of Muslims started, as in the beginning, Muslims did not accept the English language and western science. On the other hand, Hindus accepted the English language. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-96) was the first to recognize this contrast between the two religions. He made earnest efforts to change the mode of thinking of Muslims. In 1875, the first modern educational institution in Islam was established. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was inspired by the ideas of Western countries, where their wealth and power led to their enlightenment and their learning in Arts and Sciences. But at this time Muslims were lagging behind a complete generation in education. In 1875, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan founded the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental (MAO) College at Aligarh. The founding of this college was a real turning point in the educational history of Muslims. It was this college that after 1920 emerged as a prominent university of India known as "Aligarh Muslim University".

Education of Muslim Women after Independence:

By 1947 when the British power was withdrawn from India, the modern education of women was about a hundred and twenty-five years old. The evaluation of the achievements of this period can be done in two ways. The first is to compare the conditions that existed in India in 1800 to those that existed in 1946-47. This backward look shows a great achievement - qualitative as well as quantitative. Educational opportunities had been opened to women at all stages during this period and their social status had been raised to some extent. Qualitatively this education had brought women a new awareness of themselves and opened out to them a large way of life.

The advance of the education of women in 1951, shortly after independence, the census recorded that only 25 percent of men and 7 percent of women were literate. The pattern of women education today, therefore, starts with the girls and extends up to the mother, who can now attend social and adult education classes. In order to meet this large demand, the number of girls' schools and colleges increased. Muslim girls going to school and colleges also increased slowly but steadily.

Muslim parents who are anxious to educate their sons and also anxious to provide their daughter with education. Goswami (1991) correctly observes that "it is even possible for educated women to combine motherhood and a career. Educated women very easily share in decision-making about children's schooling about family planning about finance and over all perspectives of family". National policy on Education (1986) has laid much emphasis upon equal opportunities of education to everyone but it is not being translated into practice. Thus there is much to be achieved in respect of education of Muslim women there is need of wholehearted support and efforts from the community itself".

In the post-independent India, the importance of education of Muslim women gained momentum and it was realized that education for Muslim women is necessary to achieve the goal of democracy and equality. The doors of schools and colleges were thrown open to women. Who started availing the increased opportunities for education. Muslim women started thinking and feeling that they should not be confined to home only but should also share the responsibilities of the society and participate in all spheres of life equally with men. In addition to the constitutional provisions, the government of India has been showing concern about the education of Muslim minorities at different times and different levels.

At the convention in Delhi, 350 Muslim women from across the country along with academics, social experts and parliamentarians called for the implementation of Justice Sachar Committee recommendations. The Sachar Committee report released in 2006 exposes the severe socio-economic marginalization of Muslims in India. The Committee had recommended more educational facilities and employment opportunities for the communities.

BMMA (Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan) members urged for income-generating schemes, credit facilities and educational opportunities for the communities, especially Muslim women, the worst-affected in an acutely marginalized social group.

After independence realizing the exploited condition of women in general, efforts were made by the Government of India in several directions. Several committees and commissions were set up from time to time. The all recommendations were to improve the quality of life of women.

Conclusion

Keeping in view the preceding pages we come to the conclusion that Islam is neither merely a mode of worship nor a religion commonly understood as no more than the sum of several beliefs, rituals and sentiments - but rather a system of life that deals with all aspects of human existence and performances. It is a well-ordered system, comprising a set of universal principles and values for the socioeconomic, political, moral, intellectual and cultural guidance of humanity; in a word, 'Islam guides man in totality' or in other words, the rules of religion are applicable to life in total. The education system is one of them.

Several verses of the holy Quran and many ahadith of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) related to acquiring and seeking 'Ilm' (knowledge) stress human beings to acquire knowledge and not to act in ignorance. Even Prophet (S.A.W.) himself was an ardent advocate of knowledge. From the very first day of the Prophet's life as Prophet, he laid stress on reading and writing and for spreading it to others. The Islamic history is dotted with events showing the interest and desire of Muslims (both male and female) for the acquisition of knowledge as Prophetic traditions have been in their mind ever and always. From the Prophetic period to the present day Muslim men and women have done a remarkable contribution to the education system.

We have also seen that in the Indian sub-continent too, women have played a great role. They from the very early times took great interest in the cultural enlightenment, with the establishment of Muslim rule in India, Madrasas were also established where both males and females sought knowledge.

Although only higher and middle class families used to educate their girls, but later on the education system got impetus and during the Mughal period it reached its climax. Mughal rule produced many shining stars who brightened the cultural and intellectual sky of Muslim India. We also came to know that after the downfall of Mughal Sultanate not only politically but by all means Muslims suffered a lot. Although great steps were taken by luminaries in the 18th and 19th century but no such remarkable achievements were seen especially in the field of 'Promotion of Women Education'.

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