Muslim Women and their Educational Contribution during Prophet Muhammad’s (SAAW) Period

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Abstract

History of Islam bears the fact that how in the diverse fields of knowledge like religious sciences, natural sciences, and social sciences etc Muslim women alongside with their male counterparts have made tremendous contribution. Number of scholars and academicians contributed immensely on various aspects of the problems of Muslim women. But unfortunately this aspect that means Role of Muslim women in education has not received an adequate attention. The eminent female scholars of Islam are so large in number that scores of volumes will be required to describe their achievements. So in this respect an attempt has been made in this paper to highlight and discuss the magnificent role and contribution of Muslim women in spreading and dissemination of knowledge during blessed era of Prophet Muhammad (saw).

Introduction

The role of Muslim women is a bone of contention in present day, when thinking about women in Islam the foremost words that arrive to the mind of various people as suppressed, subjugated and disparate. The reason of these stereotypes on the one hand is cultural practices in the Muslim countries which digressed them from their Islamic outlook and the fallacious percipience of west where Islam is assumed to be the symbol of subservience of womenfolk. These stereotypes perplexed absolute Islamic teachings with irresponsible and cultural practices of some ignorant Muslims and are not able to recognize that Islam has emancipated women and endowed them with the most progressive rights since the 7th century. At a time when the position of women was very dreary, when woman were treated mere as a chattel to such extent that she can be bequeathed by the inheritor of the deceased. The holy Qur’an mentions that in the period of ignorance baby girls were buried alive by their parents because of the fear of increasing in economic burden and fear of humiliation when hostile tribes captured their daughters in any war. She was deprived from any definite or autonomous position in the society. In marriage her guardians sold her for price paid to her husband who could easily terminate that marriage at his will. She was made acquiescent to her husband and was dismissed from all rights and had live on the sympathy and compassion of her husband. Prophet Muhammad, the last messenger of Allah, came in such gloomy period when a lot of people repudiated the humanity of the woman. He preached Islam to mankind; emancipate women and girls from every shackles of life. During his life time Women were venerated and esteemed and were assured personal rights, the right to express their opinions and views regarding public affairs, right to
education and imparting of knowledge. When the Prophet unblocks the path of progression and absolute freedom for the vigorous, talented Arab women, they instantaneously bloom forth and demonstrate their full capability. When we look upon the history of the World, we found in every momentous period women have done a great achievement in every sphere whether it is in the political arena, in the field of education, in the interpretation of Shariah, in the court of Islamic jurisprudence. Concisely, no sphere was remained unbeneﬁcial from their intelligence, sagaciousness, intelligence and strong character.

**Contribution of Muslim women in Development of Religious Sciences:**

Acquiring and implementation of knowledge in Islam is an elementary prerequisite for all Muslims. Muslims have always been encouraged by Islam to illuminate themselves with the knowledge of their divine religion as well as other branches of knowledge. In Islam, the person who seeks knowledge is highly honoured and his position is greatly elevated. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who was himself an ‘unlettered’ person emphasised so much on acquiring knowledge that he has been differentiated from all other teachers. He sermonized to his followers in the following words:

“Acquire knowledge, because he who acquires it in the way of the Lord performs an act of piety; who speaks of it, praises the Lord; who seeks it, adores God; who dispenses instruction in it, bestows alms; and who imparts it to its ﬁtting objects, performs an act of devotion to God. Knowledge enables its possessor to distinguish what is forbidden from what is not; it lights the way to heaven; it is our friend in the desert, our society in the solitude, our companion when bereft of friends; it guides us to happiness; it sustains us in misery; it is our ornament in the company of friends; it serves as an armour against our enemies. With knowledge, the servant of God rises to the heights of goodness and to a noble position, associates with sovereigns in this World, and attains to the perfection of happiness in the next.”

The command of the Holy Qur’an and traditions of prophets concerning the acquiring of knowledge does not merely dictate to men; the women on equal terms required to acquire knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ regarding the importance of acquiring knowledge is reported to have mentioned a famous Hadith; prophet ﷺ said, “*Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim (both men and women)*”

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2 Sunan ibn Majah, Book of Sunnah, Hadith no. 224.
to the women education was that a noticeable change was brought about in Arabian society. Women who had been looked down mere as chattel, incapable for learning became the most learned personality of their period. After understanding the high value that has been placed by Islam on knowledge and after becoming aware about the significance of acquiring, pre-eminence of learning and dispersing the knowledge they started to carry out this duty along with their male counterparts. During the period of Prophet ﷺ, a primary role was being performed by Muslim women in education and helped to produce some outstanding scholars of Islam. They became the source of illumination for the future generation.

During the time of Prophet (SAW) an excellent and outstanding role were performed by Ummahatul Momeneen (the wives of prophet saw) and other female followers of Prophet ﷺ in propagating the teachings of the Holy Qur’an and the Sunnah of prophet ﷺ. When Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was married to Hadrat Khadija (R.A), she was the first lady who supported him in his mission towards Islam. After her, another exceptional example in this respect would be the Ummahatul Momeneen Hazrat Aisha (R.A) the favourite wife of the Prophet ﷺ and the daughter of first caliph, Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique (R.A). In the chronicle of Islam, there is no other women who can be equivalent to Hazrat Aisha (R.A) in her efforts for the promotion of the Prophet’s teachings. She performed a central role in the growth, progression and comprehension of Islam. An enormous deal of knowledge was being transfused by her. For the Ummah, she became a living cassette recorder and is regarded Islam’s central authority on affairs relating to the role of women.

Aisha (R.A) has narrated two thousand two hundred and ten traditions (Ahadith). She narrated these Ahadith directly from the Prophet ﷺ and from his father Hazrat Abu Bakr (R.A), Hazrat Umar (R.A), Hazrat Hamza bin Umrul Arma. She is accounted among those companions who have narrated various Ahadith of Prophet ﷺ.

Hazrat Aisha (R.A) memorized the Holy Qur’an and was a great expert on interpretation and commentary due to her close association with the Prophet ﷺ. Abdullah ibn Abbas, one of the Qur’an’s best commentators and a companion of great stature was one of Aisha’s pupil. She was also well versed in fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) and was being consulted on the important points and issues of law by many prominent and illustrious companions. During the caliphate of the Khulfa e Rashideen, her Fatwa was accepted.

Another influential sahabiyat who possessed the most knowledge of Hadith and Fiqh after Sayyida Ayesha was Ummul Momineen Hazrat Umm Salmah. She was fully acquainted of finer points of Islamic law about foster relations through suckling and divorce. Amongst the most prominent and influential experts of Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) during and after the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, according to Imam Zahbi, Umm Salamah was also one of them. She has given verdict (Fatawah) in three hundred and seventy eight cases.

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Abdullah ibn Abbas often used to consult her for many points of Shariah. She also narrated many traditions directly from the prophet Muhammad ﷺ and some traditions through Hazrat Abu Salma and Hazrat Fatima. Moreover, 35 companions and the successor of the companions among whom both men and women are included, narrated traditions through her.⁵ She too had memorized the whole Qur’an. Hadrat Umm Salamah had established at her home, a school where the Qur’an, art of recitation, Tafsir, and Hadith were taught. Famous Tabe’I Hassan al Basri’s mother had also been under her guidance.

In the preservation of the message of Islam the role of women did not merely remain a Qur’anic commandment. As per the earliest Muslim historiography; in the initial preservation of the holy Qur’an and also in its transmission and interpretation, Muslim women played a dynamic role for instance, Ummhatul Momeneen, Hazrat Hafsa daughter of Hazrat Umar, She was listed among the companions who memorized the Qur’an and also among those who verified the written copies recorded after the demise of the prophet ﷺ. An originally handwritten copy of the Qur’an, out of which all subsequent copies were made during the first caliphate, was said to be under the preservation and trust of Hazrat Hafsa (R.A).

She was an exceptional writer and orator. She engaged herself in studying the finer points of religion after entering into the marriage of prophet ﷺ. She usually store in her mind the conversation of Prophet ﷺ that lead a better understand of Islam for future generations.⁶ She is the narrator of sixty traditions which she directly heard from the Prophet ﷺ. Among those who narrated traditions through her were her brother Hazrat Abdullah bin Umar, her son Hamza, his wife Safia etc⁷

Another inspiring Ummhatul Momeneen is Hazrat Umm e Habibah, daughter of Hazrat Abu Sufyan. She is the narrator of sixty five Ahadith which she directly narrated through the prophet. Through her, her daughter Habeeba, her brother Hazrat Muawiya, her nephew Abdullah bin Utba and zainab binte Abu Salma, etc narrated traditions.⁸

There are other female companions of prophet who played an outstanding role in the process of learning and dissemination of knowledge and whose examples can be emulated. The names of Fatimah bint Qais, Umm e Qais, Umm ulFazl bint Harith, Umm e Atiah are worth mentioning in this context

It has been narrated by Hazrat Abu Sayeed Hazri that, women were very enthusiastic to learn about their religion and other knowledge during the period of Prophet ﷺ. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was also so much concerned for the education of women that whenever he felt that women could not listen to him because they were instructed to be seated behind the men in the mosque, he would get closer to them and repeated his

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⁸ Ibid, P.66.
instructions. It is reported in Sahih Bukhari from Abu Saeed Khudri that some women came to Prophet and complained: men are always gathered before you and we cannot benefit, therefore appoint one day for us, so at their request, the Prophet fixed up a separate day and time to impart religious education to them (women) only and listened to their problems, prescribed the solutions and gave them instructions regarding their religious, social and family obligations. If there would be any question about the teachings of Islam they never felt shy to ask. The confidence and maturity of early Muslim women have been illustrated in many reports that in order to understand their religion fully, how they confidently posed questions to the Prophet ﷺ.

During the period of Prophet ﷺ a long line of renowned female scholars attained elevated position. A notable example in this regard would be Hazrat Asma (R.A) daughter of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique, the first caliph of Islam. With her comprehensive knowledge and scholarly excellence she became an authoritative voice on Hadith. She narrated various traditions directly from the Prophet ﷺ and from her many men and female companions and the successors of the companions conveyed several traditions. She was a righteous and scholarly woman.

Another prolific female companion of Prophet ﷺ who was very capable, intelligent and scholarly women was Fatimah bint Qays (R.A). The meeting of the Shura committee was held in her house after the demise of Hazrat Umer (R.A) the second caliph of Islam, because she was an understandable woman, wise judgemental and good advisor.10

Related educational activity, throughout prophetic (SAW) period, we come across a huge number of female companions of Prophet ﷺ who conduced in huge measure to the narration and conservation of his teachings. They generally acquired their knowledge from religious scholars and carried the good work of dissemination to their successors. In memorizing and fully understanding the holy Qur’an and traditions of prophet ﷺ the women were no less than a man. In this respect, Umm Waraqa stands out as the most prominent figure of the Quranic exegesis; she memorized the Qur’an and was known as Hafidah. For that reason Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had instructed her to lead the other women living in the same quarters as her in salah with jam’ah at her home.11

Conclusion:

In sum up, we would like to say that in the West the role of Muslim women has been misunderstood. The reason for this is the general ignorance of the Islamic system and the misrepresentation of media. It is worth to say that Muslim women right from the period of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ throughout the ages are seen renowned in the domain of education. They workout with all their aptitude, capability and wisdom for the cause of Islam,

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for its welfare and dissemination to such an extent that no student of history can ignore their fundamental role in the way of Islam nor can under appreciate it.

Such were the great rather to say the competent, influential, and inspiring women of early period who with their high intellectual faculties, outstanding aptitude and clear comprehension embellished the pages of history. Muslim female scholars, throughout Islamic history took an outstanding role in Islamic scholarship and did not impound their learning only to private study, but made enormous efforts and struggles along with their male counterparts to take their position as students and teachers in public academic institutions. Thus it is worth to say that women during prophet’s life were more emancipated and also big icons of enlightenment and wisdom.