

# WOMEN AND EDUCATION FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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## Introduction

Islam is a religion founded on the principle of peace, fairness, and equality (Bush, 2001). However, it appears that a global false image of Islam is emerging. Islam is seen as a religion in which females are denied many fundamental rights, including access to knowledge, due to Muslim countries' chronically low female literacy rate. This research examines the most major Islamic guiding sources, the Holy Qur'an and Ahadith collections, to see if Islam prohibits girls from receiving an education (the traditions of the prophet Muhammad, S.A.W.). It examines the literature to characterize the Islamic perspective on learning and to observe how academics in Muslim countries have reacted to men's seeming aversion to female education. This research adds to the body of knowledge about Islam by exploring Islam's perspective on female education.

## Islamic Attitude towards Girls' Education

The verses on knowledge in the Quran begin this part, which is written in gender-neutral wording. The author claims that "the Quran is at the center of the faith and its commandments" (Afsher, 2007). The word "read" comes in the Quran's first verses. "Read: In the name of Allah Who formed man from a blood clot, Who created. Read: Who taught the human being what he did not know in the name of thy Allah, Who taught through the pen. (1) (96: 1-5) In chapter 39, Az-Zumer, the Qur'an asks, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" (Verse 9)

According to the following verses, Allah assigns obtaining knowledge to all humans, regardless of gender, age, or race. "And Allah has delivered you out of the wombs of your mothers while you know nothing," Allah states in the Qur'an. He gave you hearing, sight, and hearts so that you could thank Allah." (78, An-Nahl). The connection between the primary terms (knowing nothing and offering thanks) indicates research and knowledge-seeking in the two sentences above. It's worth noting that the passage makes no mention of the preferred sex.

In several instances, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has underlined the importance of obtaining knowledge. "Seeking knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim..." the Prophet remarked, for example. (3914, Jaami al-Saheeh). Another Hadith instructs Muslims to "seek knowledge from the birth to the tomb," although it is not authentic (Multaqah Ahl al-Hadeeth). As a result, receiving information within a reasonable time range is no longer an option. Another well-known Hadith is "seeking knowledge even if it is as far as China" (Multaqah Ahl al-Hadeeth), albeit its veracity is disputed. There are several readings of this Hadith; some accept that the underlying purpose is scientific knowledge because China was scientifically advanced (7th century A.D.) and had produced some work equipment. Others hold to a geographical understanding that a Muslim must explore if gathering knowledge is required. They support their case with a Hadith that states, "If death happens to the student of knowledge while he is thus involved, he dies as a martyr" (Al-Bazzar). Islam is a firm believer in gaining knowledge from any source. "Wisdom is the lost property of the believer," he once stated, "and he should take it even if he finds it in the mouth of a mushrik." Mushrik is a non-Muslim term.

There are instances where the Prophet demonstrated his instructions. For example, the Muslims won the Jang-e-Badr, the first combat between believers and non-believers in Mecca, and captured 70 non-Muslims as prisoners of war (P.O.W.). For the release of literate P.O.W.s, the Prophet (S.A.W.) taught ten Muslim kids how to read and write. It should be marked that there was no preference for one gender over the other. Both girls and boys were referred to as children. "The Prophet (S.A.W.) said, 'He who has a slave-girl and he teaches her good manners, improves her education, then manumits and marries her, will get a double reward. He (S.A.W.) further said any slave who observes Allah's right and his master's right would get a double [reward]" (Al-Jami' al sahih, 46: 723), according to Abu Musa Al-Ashari in Al-Jami' al sahih. It's worth noting that this Hadith was written while slaves and captivity were still legal in Islam.

That was back when Islam was just getting started. As a result, it's important to note that Islamic teachings have promoted both boys' and girls' education since their inception in the 7th century, and this trend has continued as Islam's message has spread. "Allah Almighty makes the route to heaven simpler for the one who travels on it for obtaining knowledge," the Prophet remarked on another occasion (Al-Jami' al sahih, 4: 2074, 2699). The emphasis is on acquiring information rather than the seeker's sex. There are historical examples of women being respected as intellectuals and instructors. A'isha al Siddiqah, the Prophet's youngest wife, was a Hadith-narrator, for example. She may be regarded as a repository of Islamic knowledge after Muhammad. She has recorded and passed down 2,210 different traditions (tradition or Sunnah refers to the Prophet's (S.A.W.) words and actions). Is it feasible to teach without a bachelor's degree? No, and Islam does not prohibit any girl from pursuing a higher degree.

On another event, the servant of 'A'isha al-Saddiqah, Aisha bint Talha (may Allah be pleased with her), reports: I remained with 'A'isha. Because they knew I was her servant, people from all over the city would flock to me, including the elderly (who would ask me queries). And the younger students treated me as if I were their sister, giving 'A'isha presents through me. Many individuals would also write me letters (for me to react after consulting with 'A'isha). "O, aunt!" I'd exclaim. 'A'isha would respond, "O daughter!" There's a note from Mr. So and So, as well as his present. Please give him a gift in exchange for answering his inquiry. Please let me know if you don't have anything to donate, and I'll make accommodations for you. As a result, she'd return (the present in exchange, and I would send it back along with the letter). (Adab al-Mufrad, al-Bukhari)

Because her servant could read and write, the preceding story proves that everyone should have access to education. As a result, education should not be limited to a specific group but should be available to all men and women. According to Crocco, Pervez, and Katz, Islam was the first recognized religion to provide women fundamental rights such as owning property, a say in her marriage, and the opportunity to attend school. The study's main goal was to find out how religion and culture affect women's lives in the Middle East.

## Education in the Perspective of Islam

"Islam, being one of the world's most prominent religions, has particular and substantial educational views," according to Alavi (2008). (p. 5). All human realms were included in the Islamic definition of education. It concentrates on three keywords: "to know (cognitive), love (affective), and act (psychomotor)," which are all current educational concepts (Alavi, 2008, p. 6). The foundations of Islamic education and knowledge are then discussed by Alavi (2008), who claims that "knowledge is more than an idea or an attitude." It is a religious duty to educate oneself. Without the purification and moral polishing of the spirit, actual knowledge is impossible to attain." (p. 7). "Physical, moral, social, artistic, emotional, and intellectual cultivation" is emphasized in Islamic education, according to Gotb (Alavi, 2008, p. 7). "Who listens to speech and follows the best of it," for example, is an illustration of how Islam encourages consistency in beliefs and behavior. Those are the ones whom Allah has directed. They are wise people" (Zomar, p. 18). The primary reasons do not make a clear distinction between males and females. Instead, the fundamental point here is that males and

females have a sacred responsibility to pursue knowledge. In terms of pedagogy, Barumand claims that "lecture, question and answer, discussion, theatre, role-playing, imitation, discovery, story-telling, and self-education are some of the essential teaching and instruction methods that the Qur'an and Islamic traditions verify" (Alavi, 2008, p. 14).

Following a discussion of Islam's position on girls' education, this paper explores the reasonable causes for the disparity between prescribed and exercised Islamic teachings, focusing on girls' education.

## **A Gulf between the Ideal and the Real**

Some research reveals the fundamental reasons for women's aversion to education and how religion is used to attract specific individuals, organizations, or civilizations. Feudalism and patriarchy, for example, have been cited as important hurdles to female literacy in Pakistan by Aftab (1994). Other studies revealed top-level policy, culture, political interests, and the media's role in spreading a false image of Islam in Muslim countries. The remainder of the paper expands on the previously discussed themes.

## **Constitutions of Muslim Countries**

As Esposito highlighted, "there is a fundamental divergence between what is mandated by religious texts and what is performed in Muslim countries around the world, a gulf between the ideal and the real" (Crocco, Pervez, & Katz, 2009, p. 110). Their argument highlights inconsistencies in many portions of the Constitution, the most potent doctrine in Muslim countries. Hijab, for example, emphasizes that family law gives a man a lot of control, including making critical decisions regarding a girl's life. Thus it does not reflect Islamic law in its real sense. The President of Pakistan, for example, was directed by the Federal Shariat Court to rewrite the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 "to bring the provisions into line with the injunctions of Islam" (January 5th, 2000). Although the law may not officially declare so, Naz and Zia (n.d.) believe that in a male-dominated society, the "prejudicial nature of family laws for women, as most of them are built on strong patriarchal beliefs, where the husband always has a controlling position" makes it simple for a man to understand. As a result, the situation described above is identical in terms of allowing girls to attend school. Thus, it is necessary to review and, if necessary, change the Constitution to protect women's fundamental rights in Muslim countries.

## **Political Interest**

Many Muslim countries, like Pakistan and Afghanistan, have been concerned about education and low literacy rates. In 1978, the Soviet Union backed a strict compulsory education policy. This plan was opposed by political figures who mounted a drive against it. They promoted the notion that "modern education, particularly for girls, was un-Islamic, and that the Soviet Union was trying to disgrace Afghans by forcing formal education of their children, including daughters, thus undermining Islam and degrading Afghan religious life" Politicians in Afghanistan and Pakistan have a strong interest in the decisions of the people. A male-dominated culture, as previously said, vests all power in men; as a result, politicians focus solely on their interests to keep their employment. Girls' education was never a prominent concern in Muslim countries for the reasons listed above, and under the British government, Greenberg was no exception (Khan, 2016).

## **Islam and Women's Rights in the early history**

To grasp the history of women's status in Muslim majority communities, one must begin with pre-Islamic times. Al-jahiliyyah, which means "time of ignorance," is the name given to the pre-Islamic period. Women were viewed as second-class residents in pre-Islamic Arabia. Women essentially had no rights; they may be inherited as property or enslaved. According to the Qur'an, Arabs would bury their daughters alive during the

period of jahiliyyah. Throughout the pre-Islamic period, women were seen as property or disposable in the most extreme situations. In 610 C.E., the angel Gabriel came to Muhammad Abdullah in a cave outside of Mecca and announced him to be "God's messenger," according to Islamic legend. From that moment until his death, Muhammad received revelations from the Angel Gabriel. God's words were spoken by the Angel Gabriel. Muhammad's revelations were eventually written down around 650 C.E., and this is known as the Qur'an, Islam's Holy Book.

Narratives and reports of the Prophet Muhammad's deeds and sayings were written down after his death, and these are now known as "Hadiths." The Prophet Muhammad and the revelations of the Qur'an had a tremendous impact on women's social position. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) worked to promote equality since his message was for both men and women. Women were not considered inferior by the Prophet Muhammad; he saw them as equals. Unfortunately, women have been placed in disadvantageous circumstances in Muslim majority communities around the world due to a long history of discrimination against them in the pre-Islamic period.

Men and women are considered equals in the Islamic faith. However, why aren't women treated equally by their fathers, spouses, sons, and peers? Men and women are treated differently in the Qur'an. First and foremost, men and women are on an equal footing. Second, men are women's "maintainers," which means they are responsible for caring for and supporting their spouses, mothers, and daughters. According to Islamic beliefs, men and women have equal rights in all aspects of life; however, this most basic doctrine is not practiced in everyday life.

Allah regards men and women to be equal, according to the Qur'an. "O humankind! Worship Allah, your Guardian, Who created you from a single person made of exact nature and from them (like seeds) innumerable men and women, worship Allah, through Whom you demand mutual (rights) and (reverence) the wombs (that carried you): for Allah is always watching over you" screams verse 4:1 of the Qur'an.

Men and women are spiritual equals, according to the Qur'an. "If any person, male or female, does good things and has faith, they will be admitted to Heaven, and no injustice will be done to them," reads verse 4:124 of the Qur'an. This scripture demonstrates that there is no distinction between men and women when joining Heaven. "...Never will I permit the work of any of you, be he male or female: Ye are from one another..." reads verse 3:195 of the Qur'an.

Lastly, verse 33:35,

"Allah has predestined Muslim men and women, believing men and women, devout men and women, true men and women, patient and consistent men and women, men and women who humble themselves, men and women who give in charity, men and women who fast (and deny themselves), men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who engage much in Allah's praise."

These words, along with others in the Holy Qur'an, demonstrate that men and women are on an equal footing. The Qur'an mentions gender inequity and mistreatment of women in several verses. According to numerous scriptures, the Qur'an does not offer men and women equal power or rights. "...Wives have the same rights as husbands have on them following the commonly understood principles," the Qur'an declares in verse 2:228. Men, of course, are a step above them in terms of status..."

Verse 4:34 of the Qur'an states,

Males are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given one greater (power) than the other and supports them from their resources. As a result, faithful women are devoutly subservient and defend what Allah would have them watch while their husbands are not around. If you're concerned about women's

disloyalty and misbehavior, rebuke them initially, then refuse to share their beds, and last, lightly beat them; but if they return to obedience, don't use means (of discomfort) against them (above you all). Many Muslims interpret this phrase of the Qur'an to signify that men are the ones who supply, protect, and eventually have superiority over women.

"Some Muslims cite this scripture to support the male's role as household head, final decision-maker, and, in some situations, spiritual authority over his wife and family."

"Allah tells you concerning your children: for the male, what is equal to the portion of two females..." says verse 4:11 of the Quran. "It should also understand that a woman's evidence is worth half that of a man," says verse 2:282.

Hadiths also mentioned women's oppression and gender injustice. "If there is an evil omen, it is in the horse, the woman, and the house," Allah's Apostle remarked, according to the Prophet's Hadiths. "I have not left any affliction more detrimental to males than women," the Prophet remarked.

"If a husband invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses, the angels hurl their curses on her till morning," the Prophet remarked. Finally, the Prophet asked, "Isn't a woman's witness equivalent to half that of a man?" "Yes," the women replied. "This is due to a woman's mental deficiency," he explained. Muslim women have not always been treated equally to males. In Muslim societies, women have always been seen as wives and mothers. Gender roles have a negative impact on women in practice. In the eyes of the law, women are likewise not treated equally.

Women's uneven rights can be demonstrated, for example, in the field of marriage, where a male can have four wives while a woman can only marry one. Furthermore, Muslim women can only marry other Muslims, although Muslim men can marry Christians and Jews. According to Quranic passages and Islamic ideas, men and women are regarded as being created equal. Nonetheless, over time, historical circumstances have often conspired against Muslim women; dominant male authority traditions have made it extremely difficult for women to exercise the rights guaranteed to them by the Qur'an. Even though Muslim women are spiritually equal to males, they have historically experienced injustice and restrictive educational practices (McDonnell, 2017)

## **The Scholarship on Women in Islamic Societies**

Regardless of the procedure or the topic of study, there are a few usual things to note about much social scientific literature about women in Islamic cultures. These are political points in the broadest sense, and they apply to the entire literature. The first point worth highlighting is an interpretive division or tug-of-war in the literature between two camps: one that wants to overlook Islam as a whole of responsibility for women's low status, and the other that wants to blame Islam as a whole for women's subordination. Another sees defensiveness against Islam as a trap, leading to improper "buy-in" to conservative explanations for gender imbalance and away from seeing a secular attitude as the apparent remedy. The second element to consider is the disparity in literature coverage. Some regions, countries, and sub-national groups receive far more attention from scholars than others for strictly "political" reasons.

## **General Features of the Scholarly Literature**

### **Two Interpretive Poles in the Literature**

Let's start with the first point: writings regarding women and Muslim civilizations tend to fall somewhere in the middle of two interpretive poles. Apologetics about women's lives inside conservative/fundamentalist Muslim communities and "Orientalist" exaggeration about how terrible Islam is to women are non-scholarly

representations of the two sides. On women's issues, scholarly and social scientific study avoids either extreme. Regardless, there are opposing "views" on what is happening to women in Muslim communities and whether Islam is to blame.

The more positive portrayals of women that feminist Muslim scholars frequently write reflect an attempt to combat ethnic nationalism, the supposed Western bias of an extensive, pessimistic view of women's situation, and the inclination to blame inadequate status and limited rights on Islam. Scholars who support this viewpoint argue that Islam is not inherently unjust to women. It should fight Islamophobia by emphasizing that other factors play a significant role in the truths of women's lives. The basis of women's subjugation can be read in two ways: patriarchal social ties that existed before Islam and affected its expansion, or patriarchal social relations that existed before Islam and influenced its growth. Another factor is legal repercussions and structural concerns, and general trends in the global political economy, which disadvantage women compared to men. An Iranian political economist, Valentine Moghadam, says that women's poor labor force participation is related more to the oil economy than Islam in the Middle East and North Africa. An anthropologist named Mounira Charred analyzes the status of women in three North African countries: Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, and believes that the disparities in women's socio-political support and access to constitutional rights are due to how the societies' kinship systems influenced the state-building process differently, rather than to Islam. Other researchers, particularly anthropologists, who predominate among women and Islam scholars, dispute negative perceptions about women's experiences by emphasizing how women navigate society despite limits to subvert repressive norms and attain their aims. Women's capacity to act as agents is highlighted by such academics, who underlined the significant variation in the socio-political and legal frameworks that Islam underpins, referring that Islam is not to blame for women's subjugation throughout the Muslim world.

The opposing camp, termed "Westoxified" by others, offers more pessimistic views of women's existing position and potential in Islamic countries. Despite their ignorance of the West's patriarchal problems, Haideh Moghissi and Hamed Shahidian, for example, realize that Western observers have always had ulterior motives for focusing on, and often sensationalizing, the maltreatment of women in Muslim communities. These scholar-activists, on the other hand, are less competent to criticize misogyny in the name of Islam, stating that defensiveness about women's conditions under Islam devolves into harmful apologetics. Islam, in its current form, is a significant determinant of women's inadequate status in Islamic communities, according to this unfavorable group. Bending over backward to be "culturally sensitive" and absolve Islam of responsibility for women's servitude is a difficult position for them, as it ultimately encourages, or at the very least does not oppose, resurgent religious forces that wish to restrict women further (Offenhauer, 2005).

Although the positive camp's claim that non-patriarchal readings of Islam's sacred writings are legitimate, such "readings" have no practical authority. Furthermore, fighting for the advancement of women's lives through the reading or "rereading" of sacred texts confirms Islam's relevance to "woman concerns," playing into the hands of religious groups seeking to obstruct the path to religious-state separation. According to this negative position, women's concerns are best tackled in secular terms and in the name of addressing universal human rights violations.

## Conclusion

In today's globe, Islamic constitutional and social systems approach and fall short of women's rights in varying levels. On the whole, Muslims regard Islam as advanced in these areas. Many Muslim feminists feel that the challenges faced by Muslim women today are the same challenges faced by women everywhere: cultural constraints, illiteracy, poverty, political repression, and patriarchy. Muslim feminist intellectuals and activists harshly criticize gender inequality all around the world. To claim Muhammad was a feminist in the

modern sense would be misleading. Even though the same hurdles to women's equality existed in 7th-century Arabia, Muhammad overcame them by elevating women's status in society throughout his life.

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