

A Comparative Study of the Significance of Female Education in the Perspective of Islam & Modern Education

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Abstract

Knowledge is light while ignorance is darkness. Allah (SWT) bestowed human being knowledge with the help of pen. It is a routine that people learn through the pen but Allah (SWT) has bestowed upon his chosen personalities as the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) without pen which are miracles in human history. According to Mr. Amir Ali "The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was an unlettered philosopher". Knowledge plays a significant role for the whole mankind. Without the light of knowledge the human beings will be uncivilized. Allah (SWT) Provided human being with the opportunities of seeking knowledge without any discrimination whether it be male or female gender. This message has been delivered by the Holy Prophets as well as their disciples. The way of getting knowledge is called education. In the following discussion the significance of education has been illuminated. The female education is also important because if a lady is educated, the whole family will be educated. This article discusses the significance of female education in the perspective of Islam and modern education.

Keywords: Significance of Female Education, Islam, Modern Education

Introduction

Knowledge is light and power. Through knowledge human can explore this universe and even itself. The significance of knowledge can be judged by the first revealed verse of the Holy Quran which commanded the Muslims to "Read". Read with the name of the Creator. Many other verses of the Holy Quran indicates the importance of knowledge by saying that known and unknown people are never equal just like light and darkness are not equal. Education is the way of transferring of knowledge.

Literal and figurative meaning of Education:

knowledge (*Ilm*) and education (*T'aleem*) both the words are derived from Arabic word (ع-ل-م) which means learning, acquisition and to find out.¹

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Knowledge means to believe in. Although knowledge & knowing comes from believing in something. In addition knowledge means to know and get the knowledge of something. Literally knowledge & knowing are synonyms that is why both the terms has the same meaning. The knowledge removes ignorance.

The Holy Quran mentioned:

"After they got knowledge of the Right"². In another place it is mentioned:

"Allah made them know which they didn't know"³ In this verse knowledge has been taken as knowing⁴.

In English language, the alternate word for gaining knowledge is education which is derived from the Latin word Educare, Educere which means "to bring up" and "to bring out". It also means to express⁵.

Allah (SWT) has bestowed upon men numerous talents. According to these capabilities, each individual is different from the other. Through education these capabilities are brought into practice which serves in the best possible means. In addition, education moulds behavior and character of human being that they might lead a prosperous life as a good citizen. Education is such an act which brings out all the capabilities of a student and makes him a complete personality. Education moulds his attitude and behavior in such a way that a student may be a successful both as an individual as well as social and will be a good citizen.

In the above discussion the following four factors has been mentioned regarding a learner.

1. Expression and development of all the capabilities of a student.
2. To completion of student's personality.
3. The character building of a student
4. The prepare a successful student both in individual and collective life

The above statements about education is complete in all respects because it is applicable in each and every society of the world. In the educational process. A member of a society has to play the role of an expert and a teacher and he may prepare a society for upbringing successfully.

Educationists have defined "Education" in different ways and they have different opinions and definitions. Some say that education means to develop the mental aptitude. Some give it the name of social adjustment while some say it is the search for the truth. Some say education means to develop a child mentally and morally. Some of the educationists are of the opinion that education is the development of human intellectual. Some have named it as social adjustment. Some has declared it as the process of physical and moral development and some has declared it as the process of the organization of a

healthy society. Some experts have named it as re-organization and continuous re-construction of experiments. But it is a fact that education is the name of growth and continuous development of the whole aspects of human life which promotes human personality and can cause to achieve the high experience. These capabilities of human beings are as following:

1. Physical abilities.
2. Mental & intellectual abilities.
3. Social abilities.
4. Emotional abilities.
5. Moral abilities.
6. Spiritual abilities.

Education performs its role for the gradual, continuous and universal development of these human abilities. This is the multi dimensional human training process and different educational activities may be the cause of development and prosperity of different aspects of human personality.

This process of development is integrated as well as gradual so that every aspect of human life development may be possible and that is possible through the accomplishment of its personality and social life may be developed in an equal way.

The First Man; Adam (A.S) & Education

As compare to other creatures human being needs education & training step by step in their practical life. Allah (SWT) gifted education to the first human being Adam(A.S) and ended this continuous process of human guidance, educational training by Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) which is a regular collection of lectures and books through which human being can lead a successful life. The summary and whole heaven knowledge has been preserved as miracle till eternity in the Holy Quran. However the main purpose of these human activities is to arrange human being with the bless of education. Instead of the Islamic point of view, the modern education philosopher are of the view that early humans were ignorant, had no khnowledge and were univilized.

The Holy Quran & Education

The word "knowledge" is used Three hundred and twelve (312) times in the Holy Qruan ⁶ which proves as a guideline for humanity and is a code of life till eternity. The Holy Quran invites to good deeds and prevails from bad deeds. There is a stress on knowledge in different styles. Sahih Ahadiths explain and interprets the Holy Quran so there is a division of knowledge in

Hadith. The profitable knowledge and the non profitable knowledge⁷. Allah Almighty has insisted the human being to pray:

"Oh Lord! Increase me in knowledge⁸"

It highlights the vitality of getting knowledge. This verse indicates that even the Holy Prophet (SAW) himself is not exempted from the knowledge. On another occasion Allah (SWT) says:

"Say, those who have knowledge and have not, can be equal?"⁹ The traits of a learned man has been mentioned in the Holy Quran. "Allah will increase the ranks in the heavens of those who believe in Allah and whom are given knowledge¹⁰."

Taqwa (Fear of Allah) and Tazkia Nafas (self Purity) is a systematic aspect of Islam. Only the scholars know about them. The Holy Quran mentions it as:

"Those who fear Allah are the scholars only¹¹"

The chain of revelation had stopped after the revelation of the Holy Bible but it got started again when Allah (SWT) sent the angle Jibreel (A.S) and sent the first verses of the Holy Quran on the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in the cave of Hira. The first word was about "Read".

"Read with the name of the Lord¹²."

The importance of knowledge can easily be judged by this first word of the Holy Quran. Not only had this but it further said:

"Read with the name of Allah (SWT) who created."

It indicated that this knowledge will be under the umbrella of the creator who monitors all the actions of the human being and He monitors the whole of the universe and He knows all the ways of creation. The man may get arrogance with the knowledge so he should think over his creation that what he is made of? He is made from a drop of water. So if he remembers his creator and follows his rules and regulations, he will be the crown of the universe but in other case he will be in loss.

Education in the Light of Ahadith

Hadith is the sayings, actions the matters on which the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) kept silence. Ahadith is the plural of Hadith. These ahadiths are the explanations of the Holy Quran. The basic rule for the success of human being is to follow the commandments of the Holy Quran and ahadiths. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) explained on many occasions the importance of knowledge. A few of them are quoted here. He said about the importance of knowledge. The Prophet (SAW) said:

"Seeking knowledge is the duty of every Muslim¹³"

On another occasion, the Holy Prophet said:

"Oh Lord! I request you for awarding of knowledge which gives me benefit (here and hereafter).¹⁴ "

Here the important of point is that the knowledge which gives benefit because the knowledge without this request can be destruction for an individual as well as for the society and it is visible in non Muslim societies that they have made fatal ammunitions, bombs etc of human destruction. Therefore the Holy Prophet (SAW) ordered his followers to seek such knowledge which can be source of betterment for human beings. He said: Oh Muslims! demand your Lord the knowledge which is beneficial and seek refuge of the Lord from the knowledge which is not beneficial.¹⁵ As said earlier that the knowledge and education which creates the fear of Allah in the hearts of the human being are beneficial but the education which makes him stray from his creator is harmful and it brings destruction therefore Allah mentioned that "Read with the name of Allah". It indicated that the knowledge within the limits told by the Lord and His prophets.

Education in the regime of the Prophet (SAW):

The life of the Holy Prophet (SAW) can be discussed into two parts. 1.life in Mecca and 2.Life in Madina. In this way the educational system can also be divided into two parts.

1. Educational system in the days of Mecca.
2. Educational system in the days of Madina.

1. Educational system in the days of Mecca

The age in which our Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was born was the age of ignorance. The Arabs would fight for nothing and would feel proud on it. They would bury their daughters as they were not a source of income and would share their meals. The Holy Prophet (SAW) was given prophet hood in the age of forty. These were the days of ignorance and in the beginning of Islam a few people embraced Islam. Muslims were in difficulties, therefore an obvious program for education was not possible. The opponents were powerful while the Muslims were weak. The Holy Prophet preached Islam in a secret way. Dare Arqam was the first school which situated in a nearby mountain of Safa. It was the house of Arqam Bin Arqam(R.A), a companion of the Holy Prophet (SAW). The Holy Prophet would teach Islam here very secretly and with the passage of time the number of Muslims was increasing slowly and gradually. They were taught the basics, beliefs and Morals.

Apart from Dare Arqam, people would repeat the commandments of Islam with each other. And it was an informal way of education. It is the speciality of Islam that each and every member of Islam will be a preacher. Whatever he learnt was to preach to others. As conclusion we can say that apart from Dare Arqam house there was no other formal school for Muslims. Females of Mecca (including males & females, young, middle aged and old age) would visit the home of the Holy Prophet (SAW).

2. Educational system in Madina

As mentioned earlier the situation in Mecca was not congenial for education of Muslims but after the departure of the Holy Prophet (SAW) to Madina, the situation totally changed. The educational system of Madina can be divided into two sections. 1. Formal education 2. Informal education

Formal Education

A chamber called *suffa* was constructed in the mosque of the Prophet (SAW) (Masjid-e-Nabwi). It was. The border students would get lectures from the Holy Prophet (SAW) here and would live there. It was a regular school. Hazrat Abu Huraira (RA) was one of them. Some of the people from outside would also come, live here and get educated for a short time while a number of students were full time and regular students. The number of students increased and decreased time to time. These students were called "Qurra'a" as mentioned in Musnad Ahmad and Sahih Bukhari ¹⁶ The people who were sent as teachers and were killed in the incident of *Uraina* were graduates of the *Suffa*.

In Formal Education

Abdullah bin Abbas (RA) says:

"Different tribes of Arabs sent their group of people for learning Islam.¹⁷"

Malik Bin Al Hawairis is one of the example. He came as the representative for his tribe and stayed in Masjid-e-Nabwi for twenty days. When he was returning his home, the Holy Prophet (SAW) said to him:

"Go back to your family, teach them the commandments of Islam which you learnt and perform the prayers as you saw me performing¹⁸"

Mosque of the Prophet (SAW) was the centre of learning in these days.

Apart from the central mosque (of the Holy Prophet (SAW)), people used to go to other Islamic scholars who were living in the city of Madina. They were more than seventy in number. People would ask them questions regarding Islam and would learn the Holy Quran¹⁹

Female education in the age of the Holy Prophet (SAW)

The Arab history tells that reading and writing was not very much common. But immediately after the revelation of the Holy Quran, people focused on reading and writing and the prisoners of the battle of Badar were released on the condition to teach reading and writing to the Muslim children. Apart from the males, the females also took part in educational activities. The Holy Prophet (SAW) commanded Shifa binte abdullah to teach Hazrat Hafsa the skill of reading and writing. Shifa binte abdullah narrates:

"The Holy Prophet (SAW) came and said to me while I was sitting along with Hazrat Hafsa, "why don't you make Hafsa learn the charm as taught her reading and writing?"²⁰"

Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah writes about the female education in the age of the Holy Prophet (SAW) that he (the Holy Prophet (SAW)) appointed women teachers at different occasions like: Umme waraqa, Shifa binte Abdullah and Hazrat Ayesha (RA)²¹.

Separate Locations for Females Education

The Holy Quran indicated towards females and families in rhetoric way:

"O believers! Save yourself and your families from the fire"²².

And the Holy Prophet said:

"The best amongst you is the one who is best for its family and I am the best for my family"²³

Women used to come to the Holy Prophet (SAW) at different occasions for inquiries of different problems specially related to females. The Holy Prophet (SAW) would listen them with attention and would answer them. The Holy Prophet (SAW) used to visit regularly his daughter Fatima at her home. He always treated females with love and respect. The Holy Prophet (SAW) said:

"I like from the world, women, fragrance and the coldness of my eyes is in the salat."²⁴

Once a woman came to the Holy Prophet (SAW) and said:

"O Prophet! men come to you and learn from you, please select a day for us (women) only, we will come and learn from you". The Holy Prophet (SAW) said: "Women should gather on a day and a place". The women gathered, the Holy Prophet (SAW) came and taught us"²⁵.

Female education at Homes

As the Islamic state was passing through an evolutionary primary stage, so the females were given education at their homes. Allah said:

"O believers! Save yourself and your family from the fire".²⁶ The Holy Prophet said: "Teach your ladies Sura Al-Noor".²⁷ A group of the young Muslims

remained for a few days alongwith the Holy prophet (SAW) for learning Islam, the Holy Prophet told him: "Return your homes, remain with your families, teach them and make them practice Islam."²⁸ "

Many of the companions of the Holy Prophet (SAW) would teach at their homes themselves but sometimes if they felt, they would call a specialist of a field and he would teach their families. The sister of Hazrat Umar is a good example. Fatima (The sister of Hazrat Umar) and her husband Hazrat Saeed (RA) were taught by Hazrat Khubab bin Al-Arat (RA) while Hazrat Umar (RA) came to their housed and beat them badly²⁹. Hazrat Umar (RA) once said:

"Hazrat Saeed (RA) used to come to my sister's home for teaching them the Holy Quran³⁰".

Sometimes the Holy Prophet (SAW) would send a representative towards women. Hazrat Ume Atiya said:

"After the Hijra, the Holy Prophet (SAW) called us to gather in a house and sent Hazrat Umar (RA) as his representative. He came and siad salam. we replied him. He then said: "I am the representative of the Holy Prophet (SAW). He ordered us to send young boys and grown up women (of periods) to both of the Eids and Juma prayer is not compulsory for you and (the Holy Prophet (SAW)) stopped us (women) to join the funerals³¹".

Mosques and Eidgahs as learning centres

Many narrations can be quoted where we can know that mosques and eidgahs were learning centers for males as well as for frmales. Hazrat binte Harisa said:

"I memorized Sura Qaf only by the Juma addresses of the Holy Prophet (SAW)".³² Hazrat Khawla binte Qais said: "We would listen the Juma addresses of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and we were in the last lines of the ladies".³³ Some narration says that the Holy Prophet (SAW) would come to the ladies side and would teach them some Islamic orders as they had not listened.³⁴ It was a common practice of women to go to mosques in the time of the Holy Prophet (SAW) as Hazrat Ayesha (RA) narrated.³⁵ "

Going to eidgahs was also a common practice at the age of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Hazrat Ume Atiya (RA) said:

"The Holy Prophet (SAW) ordered us to come out to eidgahs on Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Azha. Young and grown up ladies used to remain separate from the ladies with period but all would participate in the prayers. (Ume Atiya (RA) says "I said! if there is no veil for a lady, how she will come out? the Holy Prophet (SAW) said: her sister should arrange for her³⁶."

But it is very clear that the ladies were provided separate location at different occasions like eids and juma prayers.

The home of the Holy Prophet (SAW) as an educational centre

The home of the Holy Prophet (SAW) was centre of learning. In the age of Mecca as well as in Madina a large number of women visited the home of the Holy Prophet (SAW). According to Dr. Yaseen Mazhar Siddiqi:

"It was highly discouraged by many seerah writers to mention the ladies of that time³⁷".

In the age of Mecca, different people specially females visited the home of the Holy Prophet (SAW). These included the ladies of Quraish and the other female residents of Mecca. There were also a large number of visitors of young and old ladies, including Muslim and non Muslims. People from all over the Arab who came to perform hajj and umra also visited the home of the Holy Prophet (SAW).³⁸ Hazrat Ayesha praised the ladies of Ansaar for "their bold questions without any hesitation".³⁹

Female Education and Hazrat Ayesha(R.A)

The Holy Prophet would give Moral and Religious Education time to time to men as well as to women. He (SAW) had specified a day in a week for women education. The Holy Prophet said:

"Anyone who has a lady slave, he trains her nicely and educate her in a well manner, then releases her from slavery, will find double reward⁴⁰."

Aysha binte Talha said that the wives of the Holy Prophet (SAW) specially Hazrat Aysha Siddiqa (The mother of all Muslims) (R.A) would teach not only the Muslim women but also the Muslim men. Many people (including the companions of the Holy Prophet and their disciples) would ask Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa questions related to Tafsir, Ahadith and fiqh. She would teach not only the common men and women but also the female slaves.

Apart from the Holy Prophet (SAW), Hazrat Ayesha Siddiqa (The mother of all Muslims) (R.A) also gave fatwa in many matters after the Holy Prophet (SAW). She would answer many questions related to Tafsir, Ahadith and Fiqh. Ayesha Binte Talha (one of the disciple of Hazrat Ayesha (R.A) reports that I would receive letters from far away areas of the country in which many problems related to fiqh were asked. I would present them to Hazrat Ayesha (The mother of all Muslims) (R.A) for the answers. She would give me instructions to write the answer in this and that way and she would order to send a gift along with the letter and if she could not manage, ask me for that" ⁴¹

Aristotle and Plato's views about female education

There are two main views whether human life started with the knowledge or ignorance? According west's views the human was ignorant in

the early life and with the evolution, he got educated and civilized while the Islamic view is opposite because Allah sent the human being on earth as his representative and Khalif therefore he was guided through revelation. Allah Says: "Allah taught Adam all the names"⁴² In the History, Aristotle and Plato were the people who advocated for female education but they also restricted to basic education only. They did not give any clear advocacy for the higher and quality education of females. In the modern age in the non Muslim world specially Europe and USA has based their educational policies on the Aristotle and Plato's views and that is why even today the females rarely get to the higher education.⁴³

In Islam male and females are equal in many matters. In education both are equal. The Holy Prophet (SAW) said:

"Getting education is the duty of every Muslim"⁴⁴.

Here the word is comprising both genders the male as well as female.

There are many reasons for female education in Islam. For example: The Holy Prophet (SAW) focused on the education of his wives (The mothers of the Muslims) and that is why they contributed to the Muslim society. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) induced the Muslims on many occasions about the female education. Like he said:

"Anyone who brought up three females, educated them and treated them well, will go to paradise"⁴⁵.

The female education is important because in leading life, women is always a consultant and an educated consultant can give a good advice.

Ordinarily, female affects the family life more than a man. The training and education of children is directly related to house women than men.

Through education, a woman can be aware of her rights and will demand for it, in other case she will be deprived of her rights as it can be seen commonly. And in the past this practice has been very common.

The Holy Prophet (SAW) addressed the Muslims not only the man but also the women.

Female education, in some cases, is more important because men can't work in such places like the medical treatment of female, delivery cases etc. Here women can work more effectively than men.

That is why in the field of Ahadith, a number of women took part. The history secured their names. Ibne Sa'ad in his famous book "Al-Tabaqat" wrote the 8th volume only on women who participated in Muslim history and performed some remarkable jobs. The daughter of Imam Tahawi, Imame Malik and Binte Shati in the near past are some great names.

Female Education in the Current Era in the Light of Islam

Maulana Abdul Hai Lakhnavi was asked about the female education. He said: According to Islam, it is right. Female education is encouraged in Islam⁴⁶. Many Ahadith, the sayings of the Islamic scholars are very much clear about it. Mufti Kifayatullah, the Grand Mufti of India from Delhi, answered this issue. He said:

"Opening of female schools, sending girls for getting education, learning of women requisite education is quit lawful according to Sharia. It is clear from a number of Ahadiths to assemble women in a particular place for getting knowledge. So Imam Bukhari named a chapter in his famous book Al-Jamia Al-Sahih with this title. He mentioned some of Ahadiths of the Holy Prophet (SAW) that women would gather in a specific place and the Holy Prophet (SAW) would teach them the commandments of Allah. Experiments reveal that getting education collectively is more effective than getting it individually.⁴⁷"

He further mentioned that it is lawful for girls to get knowledge. Skills like arithmetic, sewing, stitching and cooking are very much essential for girls but they must be provided a secure and veiled environment⁴⁸.

Some people indicate that it was the speciality of the Hazrat Aysa (R.A) that she taught many men and women of her time. Many books like Fathul Bari clarify that this teaching was common to all (men and women).

Muslim females can work in so many fields of life. Imam Ghazali distributed the knowledge into two categories. 1. Farze Aain (Individual obligation) and 2. Farze kifaya (Collective obligations). The first one is the duty of every Muslim. Each and every person has to perform it individually like prayer, fasting, zakat and hajj while the collective obligations are those in which some people of the society must take part otherwise the people of the whole society will be questioned for their collective duty. The example of the second one is the funerals, having doctors, engineers and army persons. Although it is not obligatory for everyone but must be performed by some people. The Holy Quran indicated towards it:

"And keep prepared your force as you can in against your enemy and the enemy of Allah.⁴⁹"

There are some specific fields of life where only women can work as mentioned earlier, like medical field. the treatment of females in gynea, delivery cases etc. Some specific sewing centres, industries related to ladies wears etc. Even in forces many times ladies are required to help the men in searching houses and criminals.

The modern educational researches reveal that female teachers can be more effective at primary levels than males. At the playgroups, female teachers are

the best choices. Women schools, colleges and now women universities can work only if female teachers are available and it is the need of the modern age.

Conclusion

Islam is a religion of Nature. It has given the rights and duties to each and every person and at any stage of life. Therefore it says:

"Be aware! each and every one amongst you is responsible and everyone will be asked about its responsibilities⁵⁰ⁿ"

That is why each and every one is responsible. So every man of the society is responsible to educate all his subordinates (family) and it is very clear that the family include wife, daughter and sisters and their children. All these obligations and rights can be known through education. Islam has given very clear instructions regarding the female education. The age of the Holy Prophet (SAW) indicates the significance of female education. Different steps were taken to educate females as an educated women educates the whole family. The Holy Prophet (SAW) called them in mosques, homes eidgahs and other places time to time.

The importance of female education has enhanced so many folds in the modern age. The technology has changed the world into a global village. People of the world are coming closer and the communications are effective more than ever. Therefore the Muslims must adopt the commands of Islam and in this case they can be successful in this world and hereafter.

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