



# A Study on the Importance of women Education in Islam: Issues and Remedies

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## Abstract

Muslims maintain that Islam is not constrained by any specific set of rituals, customs, or beliefs. Rather, it encompasses every aspect of human behaviour. This is what makes Islam unique among all the other religions that are practiced today. Islam emphasises its ability to transform people's lives and educate them how to live honourable lives regardless of gender discrimination on both an individual and social level since it is all-encompassing, a way of life, and a living civilisation. The Islamic emphasis on studying or gaining information is the source of this desire to cultivate a superior and ideal character. The first revelation (96:1–5) and the well-known prophetic assertion that "The gaining of knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" (Ibn Majah) are the clearest examples of this. In the same vein, there are additional examples where people of different gender identities have been equally encouraged and recommended to seek knowledge. The sacred text is authentic, and Islamic history also demonstrates that women were not only encouraged to learn during the Messenger's lifetime, but that many of his female companions also excelled in a variety of academic disciplines during that time, such as poetry, medicine, Hadith, Fiqh, and the sciences of the Quran. Despite this, a common and pervasive fallacy in contemporary times holds that Islam forbids women from accessing knowledge because it encourages gender bias. The present study is an attempt to through light on the importance of education in Islam irrespective of any gender descriptions.

**Keywords:** *Islam, Women Education, Knowledge, Ignorance, Revelation, Islamophobia, Patriarchy.*



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Islamic belief, Adam was the first man and was formed entirely of clay in the finest possible shape and size. Because of his wisdom, he was considered superior to angels, who were required to bow before him. He was

endowed with knowledge. First, it is evident from this Islamic belief that knowledge is what allowed man to rise above angels and become civilized despite being formed of inferior material. Secondly, without solid understanding, it is impossible to comprehend Allah and adore Him

alone. Because of this, one of Islam's defining characteristics is its emphasis on knowledge seeking and requirement that all men and women acquire it.

Muslim men and women are encouraged and exhorted to seek out and acquire religious knowledge, wisdom, and understanding by the Quran and prophetic traditions. Since "those who know are not equal to those who do not know," as numerous works of literature have explained, they also place a high value on individuals who are knowledgeable.

Indeed, the first revelation found in the Quran states, "Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created him." Darwin's Theory of Man's Evolution, which lowered man to the lowest of the low, is very different from this conception of man.

In order to realise His purpose for creation, which is to glorify Allah, man did not begin his journey through life with ignorance and darkness, but rather with knowledge and light; turned a germ-cell into a man! According to Dr. Zafar Alam, the phrase "who has taught (man) the use of the pen; taught man what he did not know!" is a powerful call to acquire knowledge, with the understanding that knowledge is one of Allah's greatest gifts to humanity. This demonstrates the connection between Islam and knowledge and a pivotal moment in human intellectual history.

Islam, then, transformed human intellectual history and continues to influence other global ideologies in one way or another. The rest of the Quran is full with verses emphasizing the value of knowledge acquisition for both men and women. Here are some quotes from the text: Dear God, oh! Increase my understanding; Allah will elevate those who believe and those who have been given knowledge to a greater extent. The Prophetic Traditions provide a wealth of evidence highlighting the need of education and knowledge, in addition to the revelation given in the Quran. The Prophet taught for twenty-three years during his prophetic life. "In fact, the LORD showed the believers favour when He sent an apostle among them to bring His messages to them, to help them become purer, and to teach them the divine wit and wisdom," the Quran says of the prophetic role. They were obviously lost in error before that. It was his duty to educate all men and women alike about Islam and all they needed to do to make this life and the next better. A group of people who were essentially ignorant and illiterate were

transformed into emissaries of culture, knowledge, and civilisation as a result of his teachings. However, two quotes from the Prophet's most well-known traditions on the subject are as follows: All Muslims, male or female, are obliged to seek knowledge.

Muslim jurists also held that both male and female community members should be required to attend school. Usually, they would quote a phrase from the Quran that stated that anyone who failed to teach knowledge would be cursed by Allah. Imam Shafi'I holds that a province's ruler has an obligation to force its people to finish their education even if they decide not to. If the children's underprivileged parents are unable to pay for their education, the community should, according to Al-Qasibi. A number of modern thinkers, like Majid al-Kilani in *Tatawwur Mafhum al-Nazariyyah al-Tarabawiyah al-Islamiyyah* and Abd Allah Alwan in *Tarbiyyah al-Awlad fi al-Islam*, have examined this matter and concluded that Islamic education is necessary.

The main restriction on information acquisition in Islam, however, is that Muslims are only supposed to pursue knowledge that will be beneficial to them. According to certain quotes, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) prayed in this way: "I seek refuge in You (oh my Lord!), from knowledge which does not benefit." He reportedly declared that "whoever seeks knowledge in order to argue with the foolish, to brag in front of the scholars, or to draw attention from others will be in Hell." Islam therefore views education as essential for both men and women. Islam gave education the universal qualities and made it a vital duty for every man and woman, in contrast to the mediaeval history of Europe. It also saw fulfilling this task as a social responsibility.

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The above discussion, thus, sets forth the objectives of the paper which are:

- To understand the position and perception of the Prophet (SAW) towards women education;
- To highlight the educational achievements of women throughout the Muslim history to deal with issues that are detrimental to woman education in the current scenario;
- To suggest some recommendations in this backdrop.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study analysed passages from the writings of translative verses of Quranic verses, hadith, and literature using critical theory with an emphasis on the Islamic context. The literature study discusses Islam's position on women's education and the factors that contribute to the misconception of Islamic teachings in this area. In light of the aforesaid topic, the study also examined the state of women's education in the present context. The data and information used in this paper is purely secondary in nature and some views of the local societies have been considered for analyzing the issues of women education that may be regarded as primary source.

### 4. THE POSITION OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAW) VIS-À-VIS WOMEN EDUCATION

In all civilized societies, the importance of female education has been acknowledged, enabling a society's general growth and advancement. Islam is also a socially progressive religion; in fact, it was one of the first to peacefully advocate for women's rights to an education and other liberties. The Prophet's (SAW) teachings on women's education stem from the Quran's prohibitions as well as the Prophet's traditions. According to the above-quoted first revelation to the Prophet (SAW), Allah described education as the most important and effective means of guiding humanity from darkness to light.

It's interesting to note that a woman named Khadijah bin Khuwalid was the first person to learn about and accept these verses from the Prophet (SAW). This is the first concrete proof that women were encouraged and pushed to learn. The Quran explains the Prophet's job as one of rehearsing the Revelation, purifying and instructing the people in the Book and Wisdom, and enlightening them with new knowledge; all in order to enable them to complete their religious commitments. Both men and women can have prosperous lives in this world and the next by studying and adhering to the teachings of the Muslim Al-Quran. Thus, the claim that the prophetic role of training, teaching, and reading is exclusive to men will be false. Islam uplifts the learned individual, regardless of gender. The Islamic precepts would logically be called into question if Islam denies women the opportunity to pursue higher education. Since such a course of

action would be diametrically opposed to other Islamic beliefs on their equal rights, parental status, and the promise of equal benefits upon acceptance of the divine writ and equal punishment upon rejection. Furthermore, the Quran explicitly addressed women's education through the use of feminine gender *Uzkurna*, which advises them to memorise, teach, spread, or publish the lessons they learn from the Holy Prophet (SAW) at home based on the word's varied meanings. This verse also shows how women can become highly educated and civilised, and history bears witness to the fact that they went on to become important religious figures in Islam. Furthermore, certain prophetic traditions place a strong emphasis on knowledge development in general and for women specifically.

The Prophet (SAW) is said to have said: "The learned are the heirs of the prophets, and the prophets leave neither dinar nor dirham, leaving only knowledge, and one who takes it, takes an abundant portion. The superiority of the learned over the devout is like that of the moon, over the rest of the stars, on a night when it is full." There are also reports that the Prophet (SAW) passed on this priceless legacy to ladies in his day. A unique plan was in place for women's education. According to Bukhari's *Sahih*, a few women asked the Prophet (SAW) to set apart a day for them because it was hard for them to learn in front of men.

Maudoodi uses an account from Bukhari, which claims the Prophet (SAW) said, "three persons will get their reward twice, and among them the one is who has a slave girl and educates her properly and then manumits or and marries her," to reinforce his claim. More fascinatingly, the Prophet (SAW) commanded a poor companion to teach her wife the Quranic verses in exchange for her dower, demonstrating the value of education. Thus, the Prophet believed that education was a fundamental human right for all women, regardless of their socio-economic status or status as slaves or members of the aristocracy.

Moreover, not a single reference prevents women from obtaining this privilege. On the other hand, some academics disagree with the extent and nature of women's education from an Islamic standpoint. They limit women's educational opportunities to specific fields of study. For example, the tenth-century jurist Imam Qasibi

stated that poetry, literature, and writings should not be included in the curriculum and that grammar, architecture, and poetry should only be studied optionally for men. Similarly, Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi thought that girls should only be taught religious subjects because learning anything else would cause problems. Although this is a different discussion, it would be unfair to suggest that the Islamic educational system has a gender-based and discriminatory mindset. This presumption will also go against historical facts that demonstrate how Muslim women have excelled in the sphere of education, as covered in the pages that follow.

## 5. EVIDENCES OF ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN ISLAM

The contributions and accomplishments of women in the realm of education during the Prophetic and later centuries are widely documented in literature. The women who converted to Islam were greatly inspired by its precepts, and their insatiable curiosity led to their remarkable academic accomplishments. As a result, their influence may be seen throughout the early Islamic era. It would be appropriate to note that, according to the Encyclopedia of Education, princesses only received a restricted and limited education in other parts of the world so that they could take care of their property after their father passed away. It also mentioned that, following much discussion, it was decided that it is preferable not to educate the daughters of doctors, judges, and other elites. The wives of the Prophet (SAW) and other female believers made significant contributions to education in the early days of Islam. Furthermore, it was strictly forbidden for the daughters of tradesmen and craftspeople to receive an education. In his *Short History of Women*, John Long Don Davis made similar conclusions regarding women's education during the Middle Ages.

However, in earlier times, Islam did not view these limitations as such. The disciplines that helped the women better comprehend Islam were prioritised, and they used to strive in all of the important fields of study at the time. Many Muslim women have expertise in a variety of religious sciences, such as the science(s) of the Quran, Hadith, interpretation, recitation, Jurisprudence, and other relevant fields. Men used to occasionally receive instruction from the female

companions, known as the Suhabiyat, who were experts in various subjects. Examples of this type of person are the wives of the Prophet, particularly Aisha (RA), Hafsa (RA), and Ummi Salmah (RA), all of whom had the Quran committed to memory. Umme Sa'id used to present lectures on the teachings of the Quran. The passion for education was so great that Shifa bint Abdullah Udwyah, a woman instructor, taught Hafsa even after she was married.<sup>37</sup> Umar used to heed the advice of this woman teacher with attention.<sup>38</sup> Aisha gained significant prominence in Tafsir, the Quranic commentary. References to her can be found in Kitab al-Tafsir, which is narrated by Sahih Muslim. She is the primary source of Tafsir narrations, and the Prophet informed his companions that they could rely on Aishah for half of the Quran. Aishah and Ummi Salmah were remarkable scholars in the field of Hadith science; the former had recorded over 2210 traditions, while the latter had 378. Furthermore, Fatimah bint Qays, Ummi Hani, Asma bint Abi Bakr, and Ummi All of the "Atiyah" was well-versed in Hadith science.

The Prophet was greatly inspired with the elegy of Qatilah in literature. Al-Farzdaq's wife was so knowledgeable about literature that both her husband and his adversary Jarir would consult her to resolve any literary dispute. Safiyyah from Seville excelled in calligraphy but was distinguished in poetry and oratory. The same goes for Maryam bint Abi Yaqub, Khansah, Bidawiyyah, Hafsa of Cordova, Taqiyyah Ummi Ali bint Abi al-Farrah, and other well-known figures who achieved recognition in the literary world.

Prominent figures in the fields of medicine and surgery include Rufaydah Aslamyah, Ummi Muta', Ummi Qabshah, Laylah, Mudhah, Ummi Ziyad, and others. Rufaydah even owned an operating room in her home, which was close to the Prophet's mosque. In order to treat the injured during one of the Prophet's fights, Umayyah bint Qays al-Ghafariyyah and other women were permitted to accompany him. This job is now carried out by non-governmental organisations like the Red Cross. In addition, several of these individuals—such as Al-Rabiyyah bint Muawwadah, Zaynab, Umm al-Hasan bint al-Qadhi, and the sister and daughter of Al-Hafiz bin Zahar—served as physicians in the king's palaces in addition to being professionals in medicine and surgery. All things considered, the aforementioned



data unequivocally demonstrates that Muslim women in earlier and later Islamic history were not only encouraged to pursue education in religious subjects but also achieved success in professional and technical domains.

## 6. ISSUES OF WOMEN EDUCATION

As was previously said, the Quran and the Hadith strongly support women's education and provide historical evidence for this. Nevertheless, there are misconceptions about this topic among and outside of the Muslim community. Many articles in the West portray Muslims as being backward, and some even hold Islamic doctrines partially accountable for untrue statements. Furthermore, some Muslim scholars have misconstrued the Islamic texts to support patriarchy and customary norms on women's education, hence legitimizing gender inequity in the classroom. These works by Western authors and their misreading of Islamic literature led to the false belief that Islam encourages gender bias and limits women's access to education, which is untrue.

In this paper, an attempt is made to identify the potential causes and obstacles that discourage women from pursuing higher education, and some recommendations are then offered:

### ❖ **Economic backwardness**

Muslim communities, especially those in Asia and Africa, are economically disadvantaged, which makes it difficult for low-income parents to pay for the high-priced kind of education. Eliza Johannes notes that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the cost of Western education is so high that low-income families choose not to send their kids to school, but in the past, enrollment was notable because of the availability of affordable traditional African and Islamic educational programmes. Additionally, Mohammad Saiful Islam notes that in Bangladesh, poverty prevents women from pursuing higher education.

### ❖ **Patriarchal Outlook of Society**

Patriarchy solely has an impact on women's education because males are preferred to girls in the male-dominated society. Eliza Johannes adds that educating a boy is especially crucial because he will likely lead his country or community in the future, be the head of his household, and support his family. Doctorate candidate Sumaira T. Khan of the University of Iowa in the United States notes

that a significant obstacle to girls' education in Muslim societies is not Islamic faith but rather patriarchy which has nothing to do with Islamic faith rather it is conventional concept being in practice in many societies. Additionally, it is a common belief in many countries that girls are less deserving of educational investments since they are inherently less psychologically capable and competent than boys.

### ❖ **Customary laws vs Shariah Laws**

The customary rules, which are more potent and prevalent in different Muslim communities, are the outcome of the interpretation of several unique cultural traditions that may be found in social starta or in the constitutions of various Muslim countries. As a result, they have hidden under their garbage the numerous Shariah provisions pertaining to women's rights. "There is a fundamental difference between what is prescribed by the religious texts and what is actually practiced, a gulf between the ideal and real," said Esposito, "in Muslim countries around the world." For this reason, the president of Pakistan was instructed by the federal Shariah court in January 2000 to revise the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961 in order to bring its provisions into compliance with Islamic precepts. Besides, because of the strong views of some Muslim communities, various Islamic commandments pertaining to women are misinterpreted, based on the perceptions of these customary norms in patriarchal civilizations. Consequently, certain misunderstandings about women wearing the hijab, higher education, the working world, etc. were created. The saddest thing, according to the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, is that Muslim women have joyfully accepted it.

### ❖ **Islamophobia and Strict Secular Approach to Education**

Islamophobia and a rigidly secular approach to education prevent Muslims from having their religion identity recognised, despite the fact that the modern, Western approach to education may be inclusive. As a result, it's been noted that in many nations, Muslim girls and women are discouraged from pursuing higher education due to the curriculum, uniforms, and marginalisation of spirituality.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The sum-total of the study shows that Islam strongly promotes women's education and that the existing restrictions have nothing to do with Islamic principles. The following suggestions can be useful in addressing the issues surrounding women's education.

- The government and civil society should endeavour to enhance budgetary allotments for improvement of women's education irrespective of any societal distinction.
- It's essential to expand awareness campaigns that highlight women's education in the context of the Quran and Hadith and are carried out by NGOs, media outlets, Ulama, etc.
- Muslim nations should amend their own constitutions emphasising on women's rights and education.
- Governments should modify their restrictive secular laws and Islamophobia-dominated educational programmes to make them more inclusive and acknowledge Muslims' right to practise their faith.
- Women should be encouraged for receiving education with modern curricula where they would learn about their rights and other matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc. in the context of the pure Islamic teachings as well as modern education. As a result, there won't be any more exploitation carried out in the name of religion since they will be able to identify the behaviours that violate the Sharia in these areas.
- The government should improve facilitation for Madrasas with modern educational equipment and bring them up to speed with the current educational curricula. Since parents feel safe and at ease enrolling their daughters in these programmes, the government need to take advantage of this and use them as springboards for social reform and women's empowerment.

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