



FEMALE EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS IN ISLAM: OBLIGATION OR PROHIBITION

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Abstract:

From antiquity, women were marginalized and treated unfairly in many ways, along with being denied educational rights. The female sex had not initially encouraged to pursue regular education until the latter half of the twentieth century. Although in the modern age, we live now in, several rights that Islam gives to females, particularly educational rights were refused. As per Islamic teachings, it is compulsory to acquire knowledge for all Muslims regardless of their sex. Unfortunately, several communities and religious faiths have a widespread perception regarding Islam that it constrains women from educational opportunities. The present study will analyse the educational status of the female gender in Islam and also, figure out the current educational status of Muslims. In this context, basic sources of Islam will be used to figure out the educational status of the female gender.

Keywords: Education, Rights, Female, Obligation.

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Introduction:

Every individual has a basic right to receive an education, which serves as a cornerstone to prosperity and financial improvement around the globe. In 1948, the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” declared the right to education as a human right. Although, it was recognized as a basic requirement for a long time because it empowers human beings to identify their real God-given capacity. Moreover, at the beginning of the 21st century, “Education For All” (EFA), universal allegiance was made to grant basic quality education to all people irrespective of their sex and age, with the purpose of eradicating gender inequalities in education from the basic to the secondary level. The Millennium development goals have considered education among the basic requirement just after food and shelter.

Islamic teachings have considered knowledge as a necessary requirement for both males and females. Seeking knowledge is an act of worship in Islam. It is

a highly appreciated act that if a person dies on the path of knowledge, he or she will enter paradise. Unfortunately, a huge gap is evident between the practice of Muslims and Islamic guidelines.

Female Education Rights: Islamic Standpoint:

This section will be discussed under two sub-sections, i.e., knowledge seeking in Islam, and current global education attainment of Muslims.

A. Knowledge Seeking in Islam:

The first revelation of the Qur’an was a commandment of reading, which states:

“Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth,
Createth man from a clot. Read: And thy Lord is
the Most Bounteous, Who teacheth by the pen,
Teacheth man that which he knew not,”

A general rule regarding Islamic principles suggests that when a divine order is made, no matter if the language used is masculine, the female sex is included in that divine order. Now coming to the



first commandment i.e., “Iqra”, Abdullah Yusuf Ali states that “The Arabic word for “teach” and “knowledge are from the same root. it is impossible to produce in a Translation the complete orchestral harmony of the words for “read”, “teach”, “pen” (which implies reading, writing, books, study, research), “knowledge” (including science, self knowing, spiritual understanding), and “proclaim”, an alternative meaning of the word for “to read”. Thus, the concept of knowledge in Islam is not limited to religious education rather it includes all aspects of knowledge that human beings can acquire. Also, God “teacheth by the pen”. No doubt pen (*Qalam*) is a powerful weapon in the transmission and preservation of knowledge. Apart from reading and pen, God says in another place regarding writing:

“O ye who believe! When ye contract a debt for a fixed term, record it in writing. Let a scribe record it in writing between you in (terms of) equity. No scribe should refuse to write as Allah hath taught him, so let him write, ...”

In this above verse, it is clear that “writing” is a gift from God. It is actually who taught humanity the skill of writing. Thus, reading, pen, and writing are the foundational tools for acquiring knowledge. In addition, God taught the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on him) to ask Him the following words:

“... and say: My Lord increase me in knowledge”. Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on him) has said regarding knowledge-seeking:

“Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim,”

Thus, Islamic principles suggest that seeking knowledge is an obligation upon both males and females irrespective of their age. Another famous tradition in which Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her), the wife of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on him) said that “How good are the women of Ansar (helpers) that their shyness does not prevent them from learning religion.” This, tradition also suggests that shyness should be a barrier while acquiring knowledge and asking questions in order to get an education and follow the same have been appreciated in it.

Finally, the Islamic concept of education is not limited to religion but it includes all aspects of knowledge which are beneficial for humanity. Hamid Reza Alavi, professor of philosophy of education, offers a definition of Islamic education that includes all aspects of learning., he says that “The three key words of this definition are: to know (cognitive), to love (affective), to act (psychomotor), which make the Islamic education incorporate all aspects of the human personality. Therefore, Islamic education cannot be limited to a specific place and time, but it includes all of life”.

B. Current Global Education Attainment of Muslims:

Observations indicate that non-Muslim females are much more educated than Muslim females. In the global gender gap index of 2022, compiled by the World Economic Forum. A survey of one hundred forty-six countries was carried out, of which twenty-nine were Muslims. Only six Muslim countries have found a place among the top fifties of the global gender gap index in education attainment, these include Kazakhstan, Albania, Kuwait, Brunei Darussalam, UAE, and Kyrgyz.



TABLE 1

Country	Rank	Score (0-1)
Kazakhstan	27	1.000
Albania	34	0.999
Kuwait	47	0.997
Brunei Darussalam	48	0.997
UAE	49	0.997
Kyrgyz	50	0.996

Source: Global Gender Gap Report (July 2022) published by World Economic Forum

None of these six countries have a lower economy. Now the question rises here, is it religion or economy that creates a hindrance in the educational attainment of Muslim females? Pew Research Center observes that “economics, not religion, is the key factor limiting the education of Muslim women”. In addition, the World Economic Forum report suggests that “on average, high-income and middle-income economies have an Educational Attainment parity score of 99%, compared to 95% of lower-middle income and 81% of low-income economies”. This report supports the idea that religion is not the sole reason for educational

constraints but the lack of economy is a main barrier to educational attainment. As is evident from the World Economic Forum report that countries that suffer economically like Afghanistan (146th), Pakistan (135th), Nigeria (134th), and other Muslim countries have a very poor ranking.

Constraints in Female Education among Muslims:

Is the economy alone responsible for constraining Muslim females from seeking knowledge? The answer is no because the World Economic Forum report shows that several well-off economic countries among Muslims like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Oman have not achieved good rankings in educational achievement

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Country	Rank	Score (0-1)
Saudi Arabia	93	0.979
Turkey	101	0.973
Oman	113	0.950

Source: Global Gender Gap Report (July 2022) published by World Economic Forum.

However, there are several cultural and regional problems within Muslim communities few of them are:

1. Uneducated families: Some Muslim families are uneducated and they did not allow their children to get an education, they follow their tradition, which is itself against the teachings of Islam.
2. No economic responsibilities: A misconception among Muslims is that they thought male individuals must get an education because of their family's responsible, unlike females who are not bound to earn, due to which their education is considered optional, unlike the Islamic teaching where it is an obligation upon both male and female.

3. Loss of money: Another mistake is that parents generally did not like to invest money in the education of their daughters, and considered it a loss of money because they thought after a daughter's marriage, their responsibility will be on their husband, so they only prefer to educate their male children and unfortunately tries to save their money.

Conclusion:

The religion of Islam prohibits not females from acquiring knowledge, rather it laid great stress on knowledge acquisition. Islam had made knowledge-seeking an obligation instead of optional, how come would it prevent women from education when it has



made its acquisition a duty for both males and females? Although there are reasons for the backwardness of female education, like economic limitations as well as traditional and cultural misconceptions, that drew them away from acquiring knowledge. Thus, academically it does not seem right to say Islam restricts female education rather Muslim communities have problems that restrict the female gender from education. It may not be wrong to say, Islam only religion that has laid so much emphasis on knowledge Acquisition apart from making it an Obligation. Let us conclude with the statement of Dr. Yousef bin Ahmed Al-Othaimeen, secretary of OIC, he says: "Education is the only way to empower them [girls], improve their status, ensure their participation in the development of their respective societies, and activate their role to be able to take responsibility for future generations."

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