

The Provision of Education and Training for Women during the Era of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

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Abstract

There can be no two opinions in Islam regarding women's education. There is one firm and unequivocal command: women must be adorned with the jewel of knowledge, for an ignorant woman becomes a source of her society's backwardness and disorder. By contrast a woman equipped with the ornament of knowledge discerns right from wrong, truth from falsehood, and permissible from impermissible. She navigates the challenges of life with grace. This knowledge makes her refined and cultured. By properly nurturing her children, she becomes a builder of a righteous community. Women's education is not only essential for individual advancement but is indispensable for the progress of the entire society. The study of Islamic history and the noble life of the Prophet ﷺ reveal that several steps and arrangements were undertaken for the education and training of women during the Prophetic era. Although the Islamic state was still in its formative stages and formal educational institutions had not yet been established, the educational activities and strategic approach of the Prophet ﷺ clearly demonstrate how women's education was promoted in an organized and effective manner. This paper aims to highlight the education and training of women in the light of the Qur'an and Hadith.

Keywords: Islam, women, education, training, knowledge, activities, organized, era

Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that the development and progress of nations depend on capable and competent individuals—both men and women. Individuals can only fulfill their roles effectively when they are equipped with the ornament of knowledge and provided with proper education and training. In recognition of this reality, all religions, nations, and societies throughout history have emphasized the necessity of education and have continuously strived for the intellectual and moral development of their people. History bears witness that the nations which prioritized education and made it central to their progress achieved success, prosperity, and advancement. In contrast, those that neglected education and turned away from intellectual growth faced failure, decline, and ultimately, downfall. The long course of human history is replete with countless examples that affirm this truth. However, the present discussion specifically focuses on the religion of Islam and, more particularly, on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ regarding **women's education**—its importance and impact. Islam not only declared the pursuit of knowledge as a duty but extended this obligation equally to both men and women. This declaration marked a revolutionary shift from the pre-Islamic societal norms and elevated the status of women in the intellectual and social domains.

The Importance of Knowledge in Islam

In the religion of Islam, special emphasis has been placed on knowledge, wisdom, education, and training, along with a strong encouragement for its widespread dissemination. Islam, in essence, emerged as a complete embodiment of knowledge, and thus, it became a harbinger of a comprehensive revolution in the world of education. For this reason, Islam is often regarded as an educational movement. According to Islamic teachings, knowledge is one of the attributes of Allah, and therefore, one of His names is "Al-'Aleem" (The All-Knowing). It was this All-Knowing Allah who taught Adam the names of all things, as mentioned in the Qur'an¹: وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا

It was this very knowledge that became the reason for Adam's superiority over the angels. When Allah asked the angels to name certain things and they were unable to do so, Adam (peace be upon him) recited the names, thus establishing his excellence through knowledge. This incident signifies that knowledge is what grants honor and superiority to human beings.

Allah also honored His final Messenger, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, with the noble title of "Mu'allim" (The Teacher of Humanity). In the Holy Qur'an, Allah says:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ²

"He it is Who raised among the unlettered ones a Messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His verses, purifies them, and teaches them the Book and wisdom..."

Allah Almighty also instructed His beloved Messenger ﷺ to continuously pray for an increase in knowledge. He said: "وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا"³ "And say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge'."

The Holy Prophet ﷺ took pride in being both a teacher and a learner. He used to say: "إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ مُعَلِّمًا"⁴ "Indeed, I have been sent as a teacher".

These facts clearly prove that in Islam, the concepts of knowledge, education, learning, teacher (Mu'allim), and student (Mut'allim) are central and foundational. Without a doubt, it is upon these concepts that the magnificent structure of Islamic civilization and culture has been built.

Islam has declared education to be a fundamental necessity for all human beings. The Prophet of Islam ﷺ eliminated the distinction and discrimination between men and women in matters of education—a practice that was prevalent in many religions and societies before Islam. He proclaimed that the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory for all, regardless of gender. The well-known Hadith states: "طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ وَ مُسْلِمَةٍ"⁵ "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim man and woman".

This is the distinctive feature that sets Islam and the Prophet of Islam ﷺ apart from all other religious and social systems. The Noble Prophet ﷺ did not confine the acquisition of knowledge to a particular group of people; rather, he treated both men and women equally in the fulfillment of this obligation. All human beings, regardless of gender, were given the same status and encouragement in the pursuit of knowledge.

The Teacher of Humanity, the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, was fully aware of the fact that nations are nurtured in the lap of a woman. The downfall of a woman is in reality, the downfall of humanity, and her rise is the rise of the entire human race. The Prophet ﷺ deeply understood that if a woman herself lacked intellectual ability, she would be unable to wisely raise and educate her children. A clear example of this was the widespread chaos and oppression of women in pre-Islamic Arabia, where the absence of female education led to their helplessness and degradation. Therefore, from the very beginning of his Prophet hood, the first person he enlightened with divine knowledge and awareness was a woman—none other than Sayyidah Khadijah al-Kubra (RA). In view of this significance, the Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ placed great emphasis on the education and moral training of women. Numerous Hadiths have been narrated on this subject. Regarding the education and refinement of women, the Prophet ﷺ said:

ايما رجل كانت له جارية فادبها فاحسن تاديبها واعتقها وتزوجها فله اجران.

“Whoever has a female servant under his care, and he educates her, imparts discipline and etiquette to her, refines her character, and then sets her free and marries her—he will receive a double reward.”⁶

The Holy Prophet ﷺ did not emphasize the importance of women's education merely through words, but he demonstrated it through his actions as well. When we study the books of Seerah (biography of the Prophet ﷺ) and Islamic history, it becomes evident that during the Prophetic era, Muslim women regularly came to the Prophet ﷺ to seek education and training. Through his teachings, these women attained deep knowledge of Islam and distinguished themselves in Islamic scholarship, character, and dignity.

The Pursuit of Knowledge by Women during the Prophetic Era

The pursuit of knowledge by women during the Prophetic era was so profound that Hazrat Abu Sa'id Khudri (RA) narrates: "One day a group of women came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and said, 'Men have surpassed us in benefiting from you, so please allocate a specific day for us.' The Prophet ﷺ promised them and, as a result dedicated one day a week to teach the women. He would go to their gathering, provide them with knowledge and answer their questions⁷. It is also narrated that during that time, girls studied alongside boys in the school. However, most traditions indicate that during the medieval period, Muslim girls were primarily educated at home. In the time of the Prophet ﷺ women were allowed to pray alongside men, as evidenced by various narrations. Women were permitted to come to the mosques to learn religious teachings and to participate in the Eid prayers. However, it was also clarified that women should stand in the last rows during congregational prayers. The Prophet ﷺ wanted women to be brought out from the confines of their homes and, alongside their roles in household management and child-rearing, be given the opportunity to actively participate in social and military affairs. He envisioned women playing an important role in the broader community, contributing not only to the domestic sphere but also to the societal and even military functions. This reflects the inclusive nature of the Prophet's ﷺ teachings regarding women's involvement in various aspects of society.

The Prophet ﷺ encouraged women to acquire all the prevalent sciences and took practical steps to ensure this. He appointed Shifa bint Abdullah Al-Adawiya (RA) to teach and educate his wives. He instructed her, saying, "Just as you taught Hafsa (RA) writing, teach her the supplication for the sting of a mosquito as well⁸. In the era of the Prophet ﷺ, we find many examples that indicate how women during that time demonstrated great diligence and dedication in acquiring knowledge and skills, both religious and worldly. Their contributions spanned a wide range of areas, from domestic duties to state affairs, the propagation of Islam, military services, and other domains. At that time many women, like Muslim men, had a keen interest in Hadith and Fiqh. Numerous women gained great renown in these fields. Similarly, many women from the early period of Islam achieved fame in literature and poetry as well.

It is narrated that the female companions (Sahabiyat) not only taught the interpretation of the Qur'an but were also actively involved in the propagation of Islam. Hazrat Umm Sharik (RA) worked secretly to spread Islam among the women of the Quraysh in Makkah. Many women, through their arguments and persuasion, caused their husbands or other male family members to embrace Islam. One such example is that of Hazrat Fatimah bint al-Khattab (RA), whose invitation led her brother, Hazrat Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA), to accept Islam. Similarly, due to the efforts of Hazrat Umm Sulaim (RA), Hazrat Abu Talha (RA) and, under the influence of Hazrat Umm Hakim (RA), her husband also embraced Islam. Among the women, Hazrat Umm Waraqah bint Abdullah (RA) was also a scholar of the Qur'an, and the Prophet ﷺ appointed her as the leader (Imam) for women's prayers. She was also assigned a muezzin. In the field of medicine, one of the most prominent women in the Prophet ﷺ's time was Hazrat Rufaida (RA). Her tent served as a medical center and was directly connected to the Masjid al-Nabawi. She not only provided medical care but also contributed to education in the field of medicine⁹”.

During the Prophetic era, women also accompanied the Muslim armies to the battlefield to tend to the wounded and provide other necessary services. The Prophet ﷺ had permitted this¹⁰. Moreover, there are accounts of women who achieved renown as physicians. Dr. Shelby notes that among the tribe of Banū Aws, Zainab was a highly celebrated doctor and an expert in ophthalmology. Umm al-Ḥasan bint al-Qāḍī Abī Ja'far al-Tanjaī possessed extensive knowledge in various fields but was particularly famous for her medical expertise. Likewise, the sister of al-Ḥāfiẓa bint Zahr and her daughter—who were prominent during the reign of al-Manṣūr ibn Abī 'Āmir—were outstanding physicians and among the foremost specialists in women's diseases; they were routinely summoned to treat the women of

the royal household¹¹. The above references to various female Companions confirm that women not only played a prominent role in acquiring knowledge but were also instrumental in its dissemination. Indeed, some of their educational and training institutions operated even during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ.

Regarding those women of the early Islamic period who became renowned for their scholarly zeal, Dr. Shelby notes that Ibn Hajar, in his work *الإصابة في تمييز الصحابة*, compiled the biographies of 3,451 women from Islam's first centuries. An-Nawawī, in *تهذيب الأسماء*, and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdaḍī, in *تاريخ بغداد*, likewise devoted substantial sections to those women who attained excellence in knowledge and virtue.¹² Whose enlightened vision was this, whose miraculous power transformed unrefined ore into pure silver and base clay into priceless alchemy? It was by this grace that the nomadic Arabs came to lead the world, and once-oppressed, secluded women stood shoulder to shoulder with men—indeed, in some fields, even surpassing them. All of this was the result of the exalted teachings and practical measures of the Seal of the Prophets, the Teacher of Humanity and Mercy to the Worlds, Muhammad Mustafa Ahmad al-Mujtaba ﷺ. In Islam's earliest era, women—whose pre-Islamic condition was pitiable and beyond description—seized every opportunity to pursue knowledge and the arts with zeal and diligence, distinguishing themselves in disciplines such as Qur'anic exegesis, ḥadīth, jurisprudence, philosophy, tasawwuf, history, poetry and literature, music and song, and medicine.

This reality is acknowledged openly by both Muslim scholars and non-Muslim writers. Accordingly, the renowned modern Orientalist Philip K. Hitti even states: "We see women in the highest circles already in Islam's earliest centuries. They held distinguished positions in state affairs and wielded influence. Indeed, Arab maidens went to the battlefield, commanded armies, composed poetry, and competed with men in literary pursuits—or, with their intellect, musical talent, and songs, infused life into society"¹³ In light of the Prophet's ﷺ teachings, today's women—when equipped with proper education and training—can work alongside men to eradicate poverty, destitution, and social and economic decay, thereby helping to build a prosperous society. The demand of the hour is to provide women with sound guidance and access to educational opportunities that develop their natural talents, so that we may overcome economic and social malaise, rise from deprivation onto the bright paths of progress, and stand shoulder to shoulder with the world's developed nations.

Literature review

1. "Al-Nisā' fī al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī" by Dr. Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman Al-Arifi: This research sheds light on the role of female companions (Ṣaḥābiyyāt) in Hadith and their interactions with the Prophet ﷺ.
2. "Ilm wa Tarbiyat-e-Niswān fī al-'Ahd al-Nabawī" by Dr. Hana Mustafa: This book focuses on the intellectual status of women, the Prophetic schools, and the process of their religious and moral training.
3. "The Role of Islam in Women's Education" (PhD Dissertation, Islamic University, Islamabad): This study includes an analysis of the social impact of women's education during the Prophetic era ﷺ.
4. "Role of Women in the Prophetic Era" – Prof. Aisha Lemu: A work by an international scholar that presents the social and educational roles of women during the Prophetic period in a global context.
5. "Talīm al-Nisā fī al-Islām al-Awwal" (تعليم النساء في الإسلام الأول) – Arabic Research Paper: This Arabic study investigates women's education in the early Islamic period with emphasis on Qur'anic instruction, Hadith learning circles, and the Prophet's ﷺ encouragement of female literacy and understanding of Deen.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative and historical-analytical approach to explore the provision of education and training for women during the era of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The study is primarily based on:

1. Primary Islamic Sources:
 - The Holy Qur'an
 - Authentic books of Hadith such as Sahih al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, and Sunan ibn-e- Majah
 - Classical Seerah literature including Sirat Ibn Hisham and Al-Maghazi by Al-Waqidi
2. Secondary Literature:

- Scholarly articles, dissertations, and contemporary Islamic studies related to the education of women during the Prophetic era
 - Works of reputable Islamic scholars like Dr. Hana Mustafa, Dr. Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman Al-Arifi, and Prof. Aisha Lemu
3. Analytical Framework:
- The paper analyzes historical events, narrations, and reports to understand the Prophet's ﷺ method of imparting education to women.
 - It also uses content analysis to identify themes such as equity in education, moral and intellectual development, participation in public life, and empowerment of women through knowledge.
4. Comparative Analysis:
- Comparisons are made between pre-Islamic practices and the educational reforms brought by the Prophet ﷺ.
 - The study highlights the evolution of women's status and the positive changes in educational accessibility.
5. Interpretative Approach:
- A critical interpretative method is applied to draw lessons from the Seerah that are relevant to contemporary Muslim societies, especially regarding women's empowerment and education.

Findings

1. The Prophetic teachings granted women an equal right to education and provided them with specific opportunities for training and development.
2. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ adopted a compassionate, gradual, and individualized approach to training, addressing the psychological and intellectual needs of women.
3. The female companions (Ṣaḥābiyyāt) not only acquired religious knowledge but also transmitted it, thereby establishing a legacy of scholarship.
4. Women's education during the Prophetic era empowered them to enter significant fields such as leadership, issuing legal opinions (fatwas), teaching, and social reform.
5. Due to the Prophet's ﷺ special attention, women became a confident, conscious, and practicing segment of society, contributing to the solid foundation of Islamic civilization.

Conclusion

The model of women's education and training presented during the Prophetic era ﷺ serves as a guiding light for the Muslim Ummah until the end of time. The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ portrayed women as dignified, knowledgeable, and responsible individuals who became a source of reform not only for themselves but also for their families, societies, and the entire Ummah.

The role of scholarly women from that era teaches us that Islam never held women back from knowledge and training. If today's Muslim women seek guidance from the Seerah of the Prophet ﷺ, they too can achieve excellence—both intellectually and morally—in every field of life.

Recommendations

In light of the findings from this study on the educational and training model for women during the Prophetic era ﷺ, the following recommendations are proposed for contemporary Muslim societies, educational institutions, and policymakers:

1. Revive the Prophetic Model of Inclusive Education Efforts should be made to replicate the balanced and compassionate approach of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in contemporary educational systems, ensuring equal opportunities for both men and women in acquiring religious and worldly knowledge.
2. Incorporate Seerah-Based Educational Content The Seerah of the Prophet ﷺ and the contributions of female companions should be included in school and university curricula to promote gender-balanced Islamic values and inspire young Muslim women.

3. Promote Women's Religious Literacy Establish female-friendly educational forums, study circles, and institutions where women can learn Islamic sciences, Hadith, Fiqh, and participate actively in religious scholarship.
4. Empower Women Through Knowledge-Based Leadership Encourage Muslim women to follow the legacy of Hazrat Aisha (RA), Hazrat Fatimah (RA), and Hazrat Umm Atiyyah (RA), by participating in teaching, community service, social reform, and public speaking.
5. Family and Community Engagement Families and communities should create a supportive environment where girls and women are encouraged to seek knowledge, voice their opinions, and take part in decision-making processes.
6. Further Research on Female Scholarship in Islam More academic work is needed to explore the lives and contributions of female scholars throughout Islamic history, especially those from regions and eras often overlooked.

Policy-Level Implementation Islamic countries should design educational policies inspired by the Prophetic model to eliminate cultural barriers that hinder women's access to knowledge and personal development.

¹ - Quran Kareem, Suarh Baqara, verse no:31.

² - Quran Kareem, Surah Juma, verse no:2.

³ - Quran Kareem, Suarh Taha verses no:114.

⁴ - Qazveeni, Ibn-e- Majah, Sunan, Hadith No:229.

⁵ - Qazveeni, Ibn-e- Majah, Sunan, Hadith No:224.

⁶ - Bukhari, Sahee Bukhari , Hadith No:2547.

⁷ - Bukhari, Sahee Bukhari , Hadith No:101.

⁸ - Bukhari, Sahee Bukhari , Hadith No:4987.

⁹ - Urdu Maarif Islamia, Vol: 91, Page 922.

¹⁰ - Shalbi, Dr, Ahmed Shalbi, Tareekh Taleem wa Tarbiat Page no: 161.

¹¹ - Shalbi, Dr, Ahmed Shalbi, Tareekh Taleem wa Tarbiat Page no: 651.

¹² - Shalbi, Dr, Ahmed Shalbi, Tareekh Taleem wa Tarbiat Page no: 651.

¹³ -Shaikh, Muhammad Yasee, Ahade-Nabvi Ka nIzam-e-taleem, Pge No:491.