

Women's Leadership Based on a Hadith on Deficiency of Intellect in Women

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ABSTRACT

The vast amount of views by Islamic scholars in debating this issue of leadership of women as a driving force and juristic authority stems from their respective comprehension on the scriptures of the al-Quran or the al-Sunnah. In this regard, the hadith explicitly mentions the lack of intellect in women being associated as one of the reasons women are prevented from leadership positions. Therefore, this research aims to study the hadith on lack of reasons in women that is compiled in the Sahih al-Bukhari to gain a true understanding of the meaning and intention of the hadith. To achieve this aim, this research applied qualitative research method conducted through data collection sourced from the master compilation works of hadith and subsequently analysing the data based on inductive and deductive methods. The findings of the study indicate that the hadith does not point to the prevention to appointing women as leaders in organisations. The lack of intellect mentioned in thereof refers to the aspect of memory of women in matters of testimony. Therefore, this study has significance as it explains the reality of what it means with the implied "lack of reason" in women based on the hadith.

Keywords

women's competency, leaders, hadiths, intellect

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Introduction

Historical records illustrate in abundance that women played roles significant enough in the spreading of religion of Islam, resulting in many female figures being recognized and their names are engraved in the fold of history. Among the most noteworthy is Saidatina 'Aishah RA, the only female narrator of hadith of the Prophet (pbuh) whose status was among the companions of the Prophet, and who had the most recounted hadith of around 2210 hadiths (Abu Layth, 2009). So endowed with astute reasoning that she was able to criticize the narrations of several other companions of the Prophet (pbuh), including Umar al-Khattab RA (Al-Zarkashi, 2010). More remarkably, 'Aisyah was also recorded as a credible political leader when she led the Battle of Jamal (Zunly, 2017).

In furtherance to the discussion on women's leadership, Tasnim Abdul Rahman (2018) views that women have had their shares in the leading roles in planning and management of administrative system and thereby contributed significantly towards the formation of Islamic government over time. Although the issue of female as a leading figure is still being debated amongst Islamic scholars, historical facts have seen female leaders been appointed to prominent positions in the administration of a country. In fact, there are countries that appoint women to head their government and are mandated to hold the office of president or premiership as evidenced by Pakistan. The current trends also reflect many women are being appointed to hold key positions in the administration of a country (Tasnim, 2018).

However, in the wake of the enthusiasm to push women to head or be the forefront of any organisation, there is a hadith of the Prophet (pbuh) which literally speaks about the inadequacy of women to men. This hadith on the deficient in intellect and religion of women becomes the core argument

and an authority for those who disallow women from being the leaders of the law. The hadith is narrated by three companions namely Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, Abu Hurayrah and Ibn 'Umar contained in several major hadith compilations namely *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Ibn Majah* and *Musnad Ahmad* (Meyzarti, 2017). As for the hadith narrated by Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, it is as follows:

Once Allah's Apostle went out to the Musalla (to offer the prayer) of 'Eid al-Adha or al-Fitr prayer. Then he passed by the women and said, "O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women)." They asked, "Why is it so, O Allah's Apostle?" He replied, "You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you." The women asked, "O Allah's Apostle! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?" He said, "Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?" They replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?" The women replied in the affirmative. He said, "This is the deficiency in her religion." (Al-Bukhari, 2009)

The hadith illustrates two forms of deficiencies in women, namely deficient in intellect and that of religion. More particularly it is understood that women are weak creation due to the lack of intelligence and religion (Asep, 2018). In the context of deficient in intellect, women are regarded as having low intellect, i.e. weak in mental faculty and reasoning capability. A criticism upon this hadith comes from some quarters of Islamic scholars the likes of Salih Abu Bakr, Samir Istanbuli and Ibn Qirnas for contradicting Allah's concept of equality and justice; in the sense that Allah emphasises derogatory label upon women for reasons

of deficient in religion whereas religion is relative to matters of faith to Allah, the Hereafter as well as Prophetic messages (Bloj, 2014). In other words, women are in fact equal to men in the aspect of creation, that is without original sins. In addition to scholastic criticism, this hadith also comes under line of fire from several other clusters, in particular those who advocate feminism (Robiatul et.al, 2014) who discredit this hadith to the extent of alleging that this is a forged hadith (Asep, 2018).

Context of the Hadith

The comprehension of the hadith needs to be approached in its entirety in terms of the underlying causes and the intention of the Prophet (pbuh) when he uttered this hadith. In general, this hadith which is compiled in the *Sahih al-Bukhari* and narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri describes the occasion of either Eid al-Fitr or the Eid al-Adha at a time when the Prophet (pbuh) was on his way to perform Eid prayers and he passed a group of women. Then he dispensed advice to them that they increase their alms in charity because he was shown that women were the most who dwell the hell on account of their cursing, disobeying and their ingratitude towards their husbands' kindness.

The Prophet subsequently explained the deficiency of women in religion is in the context of their testimony half of that of men's while the weakness in women's religion refers to menstruation that prevents them from performing prayers and fasting (Al-Bukhari, 2009). Thus this is an indication that the Prophet did not demote the dignity of women by looking at them as being ignorant and irreligious whereas quite on the contrary the Prophet (pbuh) himself had elaborated the meaning of lack of intelligence and religion which is instrumental in understanding the intention and purposes of the hadith (Robiatul et.al, 2014).

According to Bloj, the Prophet (pbuh) interpreted the phrase of "lack of reason" in the hadith as a mere deficiency in respect of testimony, rather than from the aspect of character. In this regard, he quotes Ibn Hazm's commentary that the deficiency is based on only two conditions, namely the half value of a woman's testimony compared to man's and women's circumstances which, in the presence of menstruation, could not perform prayers and fasting. Ibn Hazm further argues that this does not make women less of their privileges and priorities nor does it mean that they are less religious and intellectually wanting; but instead the lacks concern only the two aspects which purpose and context were explained earlier. As regards to the issue of unequal value of testimony between men and women, it is not a benchmark to prove the superiority of men over women (Bloj, 2014). In addition, there is other view that describes the lack of intellect associated with women not a form of deficiency, but rather as warning that one should not be defamed by them (Ibn Hajar, 2004).

Basically the question of women's testimony require half that of men (Fauzan, 2006) is by virtue of Quranic chapter al-Baqarah: verse 282 which reads:

... And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses - so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her.

According to al-Tabari, this verse describes the deficiency of testimony of women with the aspect of *al-nisyan* i.e forgetfulness (Al-Tabari, 2014). Based on the interpretation of the verse, the hadith of short-sightedness of women in *Sahih al-Bukhari* is also alleged as contradictory to the Quranic verse in which; the Quranic interpretation of testimony deficiency in women revolves around the aspect of their forgetfulness while the hadith interprets deficiency as lack of intellect. In addition, the hadith is also criticized due to the fact that the Quran conditions second woman witness only when one female witness is unable to provide accurate testimony (Bloj, 2014). Thus according to al-Quran, it is sufficient for one credible woman to testify.

The Quranic setting that contrasts the testimony of men and women with a ratio of 2:1 in the sense of requiring 2 female witnesses in the absence of a male witness (Robiatul et.al, 2014) shows that women's abilities from that of men in terms of retention and recalling memory in matters of crime and commerce are inadequate. This is particularly so since both fields are not of regular scope for women. The difference between women and men in this regard however does not entail disadvantage. There are in fact, scientific studies that show men and women think differently in problem solving especially in sudden situations (Bloj, 2014). Thus, solving problems in matters related to crime and commerce requires that men play major roles in carrying out important and challenging tasks that require meticulous attention (Robiatul et.al, 2014).

In the context of women leadership Meyzadi cites the view of Nasarudin 'Umar who opines that the term lack of intellect and religion in the hadith do not convey that the women from the point of view of potential are unable to match or transcend the performance of men's intellect and religion. This hadith in his view illustrates the day-to-day practises of women and men at the time of the Prophet (pbuh) which saw a man witness gaining authority over female witness. This is particularly so since the function and public roles fall into the domain of men. He further describes the term less intelligent in the hadith as follows:

"if the lack of intelligence relates to the quality of testimony while testimony is connected to culture, thus what can be understood by "lack of intellect" in this hadith refers to the limitation of the use of intellectual faculty for women due to cultural restriction of that community. Therefore, the terminology is not permanent nor having a universal application" (Meyzarti, 2017).

Based on the above discourse, it is clear that the lack of intelligence as portrayed in the hadith by context does not relate to women leadership.

Definition of Intelligence

Intelligence by terminology point of view has several meanings. According to Ibn Manzur, intellect means wisdom, understanding and obstacles as well as obstacle (Ibn Manzur, 2002). The word intellect in the Quran is also interpreted in some sense to mean knowledge, knowing and comprehension. According to Muhammad Rashidi and Mohd Faizul, the meaning of intelligence based on Quranic guidance refers to activity of thinking that leads to worthy consequences. Thinking is further defined as using information that is already stored in memory to know

something that is not known either through *tasawwur* or *tasdiq* i.e. by connecting other things to intellect (Muhammad Rashidi and Mohd Faizul, 2013). Thus this indicates that the meaning of intellect is closely related to the activity of thinking as well as memory. While from the point of terminology, the scholars are varied in determining intellect. Al-Zarkasyi states that there are a thousand views and cites al-Syafi'i's view who defines reason as a tool created by Allah Almighty for his servants to distinguish between good and its opposites. He describes that this definition is among the most well-known definitions (Al-Zarkasyi, 1992).

Ibn Taimiyyah on the other hand thinks that the mind has something to do with the brain and the heart. In other words, intelligence is the basis of thoughts and perception in the brain while the basis for desire and intention lie in the heart. Any desire is yet to become a desire until the same has been projected and the spot where this projection takes place is in the brain. Apart from that, it can be said that the heart is where guidance (*Hidayah*) is and the brain is where thinking takes place (Ibn Taimiyah, 2008). It is clear that Ibn Taimiyah associates the roles of intelligence with the brain and the heart.

Muhammad Naim b. Yasin on the other hand opines intelligence as part of instinct that springs from a soul that enables one to comprehend meaning and understand speech. He further states that medical specialists also concur with the view that intelligence is one of the functions of the brain. With intelligence, humans are able to comprehend existence and occurrences around them and thus think, remember and translate feelings to the brain through the five senses (Muhammad Naim, 2011). In short, intellect is the human ability to think and understand of something. It has in fact wider meaning (Norafifah et.al 2018).

Male and Female Brain Differences

From the physical and biological point of creation, men and women are different from one another. The discussion on the differences between men and women in particular on the aspects of the female's and men's brains are as follows:

- a) Alexis Carol states that women are different from men at a large scale. Each individual cell in the body has its own gender. This is a matter of functioning a system function and the most important system is the nervous system (Alexis Carol, 1980). This opinion supports the differences in brain formation between women and men.
- b) Medical research observes that the male brain weighs approximately 1387 grams, which is heavier than the female's weighing only 1245 grams. Medical studies have also found that the average brain size for men is 1350 cm³ to that of the female brain at 1300 cm³ (Al-Matrudi, 1990).
- c) Scientific research conducted at Concorde University in Canada found that the male brain exceeds the female brain in terms of focus and specialization. As a result, men can focus on doing certain tasks without having to divert their attention from the work they are currently doing to completion. While the female brain is not equipped with large focus ability but fragmentation of ideas at one time thereby increases the level of forgetfulness in women.
- d) Charles Morie argues that scientific fact and statistical data affirm that there are differences between genders in

terms of intelligence. He cites a US-based mathematical examination (the most important is the SAT tests) showing that the ratio of male achievement to female at 7 to 1. Likewise, the ratio of women who won the Nobel prize did not exceed 2% in the 20th century (Al-Syahhud; 2019)

e) The University of Chicago in the United States in 1995 conducted a study concluding that there is a clear difference in the methods of brain surgery between men and women. This study was supported by a study conducted by Larry Hedger and his colleagues. They found that some men outperform women in the value of ingenuity which means that the scope of intelligence possessed by men is much greater than that of women. This study supports the existence of clear differences between the two genders. Men's achievements are generally better than women's in certain topics such as math and science while women excel in verbal and courtesy skills. This explains that American male scientists are seven times more likely than female specialists (Lajnah Fatawa; 2010).

f) Neuroscience studies show that men brain's ability to solve problems is better than that of women. The scientists' findings also show that women's brains are less agile in coping with problem, pressure and anxiety at a time. Consequently, women are more likely to be angry and emotional than men (Robiatul, 2014).

g) There are also studies showing differences in brain tendency between male and female students. Female students are found to be more likely to use the left brain and have more critical thinking than male students. On the other hand, male students are more likely to use the right brain and have higher creative levels than female students. However, there are studies that show different findings whereby male and female students are found to have no difference between left and right brain tendencies (Salmiza & Anis, 2016).

Appointment of Women as Caliphs

In the context of leadership, the discourse on the need to appoint women as caliphs needs to be preceded with highlighting the *wilayah 'ammah* and *wilayah khassah* i.e. general and specific division. In this regard, al-Mawardi assigns profession into specific divisions. Firstly, *wilayah ammah* in leadership in general areas of work such as minister; secondly *wilayah 'ammah* in leadership in specific areas of work for example governmental positions in specific territories; thirdly *wilayah khassah* in general jurisdiction such as chief justice, military general and so on. Fourthly, *wilayah khassah* in leadership in specific jurisdiction such as of chief justice in a particular state or territory and others. (Al-Mawardi, 2018).

In addition, al-Mawardi further divides a ministry in a region into two sub-divisions namely the *Tanfiz* and *Tafwid* ministries. Basically the ministry of *Tafwid* assume the roles of a caliph; for example, appointment of judges, decreeing laws ect. While the ministry of *Tanfiz* functions as enforcement wing to implement the *ijtihad* or decree passed by the caliph (Al-Mawardi; 2018). As such, the ministry of *Tafwid* is seen to have a bigger role in the challenges of the designated tasks. Hence, al-Mawardi argues that women are prohibited from holding positions in this ministry save for positions in the ministry of *Tanfiz* (Al-Mawardi, 2018).

However, according to Hassan al-Banna, women are not allowed to hold any office in the *wilayah 'ammah* neither in the ministry of *Tanfiz* nor *Tafwid*. This is why, according to him that the Prophet (pbuh) has never appointed women in the general leadership, and further he had never appointed women in the *Shura* Council (Al-Samarani, 2011). Nevertheless, a contemporary scholar, Yusuf al-Qaradawi differs. He allows women to be appointed as caliph in any positions. To him, the current scenario sees that prime minister or governor is not authorized to veto any decision, due to the fact that the decision is subjected to approval of cabinet members or other committees of the council (Al-Qaradawi, 1998).

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, the researcher finds that the prohibition for women to be appointed to significant posts in any organisations to date, pursuant to the narration of Abu Sa'id al Khudri in the *Sahih al-Bukhari* is unfitting. This is due to the fact that the narration is precisely pertaining to incapacity of one female testimony. However though, there is no denying that there are a number of challenges and disadvantages to women's intellect as evidenced by the scientific researchers conducted to compare the intellects of women to men

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