

The Rights to Education for Women During the Time of the Prophet (pbuh): Analysis from the Perspective of Hadith

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of the rights of women often is a struggle in modern times, thus indirectly painting a picture that Islam suppresses the rights of women; while in truth, Islam delivers the women their rights in all aspects; education inclusive circa 1400 years i.e since the inception of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). This study intends to delve into the aspects of the rights of women to having access to education during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) based on several selected hadiths available in the al-Sahihayn. In pursuing the objectives, qualitative research was engaged to obtain primary and secondary data from master hadith compilations conducted through library research. Data analysis was conducted inductively and deductively. The findings of this study show that women during prophetic time were given ample opportunity to involve in education as evidenced by the implementation of classes specifically conducted by the Prophet (pbuh) himself apart from there being no restriction for them to obtain knowledge from question and answer session with the Prophet (pbuh) pertaining to any particular matter to gain deeper understanding of knowledge. As a result, it is clear that women in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) were not marginalized in the pursuit of knowledge as weren't the men

Keywords

women, rights, education, the Prophet (pbuh), perspective of hadith

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Introduction

The majority of writings assert that Islam allocates complete rights to women to obtain education. In this regard, Haifaa A. Jawad (1998) argues that the right to education is one of the most important rights guaranteed by Islam to women. This statement derives from the position of knowledge and education both of which are deeply rooted in Islam upon all its followers, with no distinction between men and women. Accordingly, since the time of the Prophet (pbuh), various mediums for the spread of knowledge can be seen, including studies and lectures in mosques as well as discourses of knowledge.

In short, Islam does not prohibit women from acquiring knowledge, but on the contrary it is Islam which obliges them to seek knowledge (Sadari, 2015). In this respect, the first word revealed to the Prophet (pbuh) that is *iqra'* proves that the call for seeking knowledge is prerogative on each individuals and that includes women. Likewise is the hadith "*acquiring knowledge is compulsory to every muslim*" that forms a proof base upon which women are equal to men when it comes to the duty of acquiring knowledge. The word muslim contained in the hadith according to Salah 'Abd al-Ghani has neutral association that applies to both men and women. As such women has full rights to education and teaching in Islam as is the case with the men (1996). Hence there is no issue affecting the position of women in educations.

Although Islam provides women the rights to education, the reality in Islamic countries worldwide begs to differ where women are still left behind in education. This observation resonates with McDonnell who describes illiteracy among Muslim women in most Muslim countries as among the worst. This scenario is rooted in the patriarchal system and

traditional values that shackle women within the confines of their homes since long. She further asserts that the teachings in the al-Qur'an and the al-Sunnah that acknowledge equal rights to men and women in light of education are not being translated into Muslim life. Further description can be found in the following passage:

The Islamic faith gives women the right to pursue an education; it emphasizes the value of education for both men and women. But this belief is not being translated, as can be seen from the current state of women's education and illiteracy rates in Muslim majority communities (McDonnell, 2017).

Despite the advances in women's education, the issue of gender inequality in some aspects of education is still considered by McDonnell among the worst in the world. Therefore she calls on the Muslim community to promote the true teachings of the Prophet (pbuh) to encourage women to be educated (McDonnell, 2017). In line with that, according to Sharifah Nooraida and Raihanah Abdullah, the demand to educate women as much as men had been from the very beginning of the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He ensured that women were entitled to education that he organized special lectures for them (Sharifah Nooraida & Raihanah Abdullah, 2016).

This article thus will discuss the rights enjoyed by women in education in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) by analysing some of the hadiths in the *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* both of which are renowned and agreed upon as the most authentic books second only to the al-Qur'an. The analysis of these hadiths is expected to give a clearer picture of the methods taken by the Prophet (pbuh) in the provision of women's right in education as well as to guide the empowerment of women in education.

The Rights to Obtain Special Education Classes for the Women.

The women during prophetic time had a profound interest and determination to acquire knowledge from the Prophet (pbuh) himself, in particular pertaining to the matters related to their religion. As such, they strive to obtain opportunity to learn by attending the Prophet's (pbuh) sermon at the mosque. Undeterred of the lack of exposure to mass learning, they saw the need for women only learning sessions hence exercise their rights to learning by requesting from the Prophet (pbuh) himself (Al-Ghani, 1996).

The rights of women to gain education through special study classes can be seen in a narration compiled by al-Bukhari as follows:

From Abi Sa'id al-Khudri that: The women had said to the Prophet (pbuh), the men had beat us, therefore please spare us one day from you (teaching us). Then he promised them to meet in one day. (On the promised day) he advised and taught them obligations. Then he said to them: None of you who were to be succeeded by her three children unless they become her shield from the hell fire. Then one of them asks: if there are only two children? Then he replies: and two. (Al-Bukhari, 2000).

The hadith illustrates how the Prophet (pbuh) was very concerned pertaining to the education imparted to the women in which he ensured that the women had the same education as men. In doing so, the Prophet (pbuh) requested of the women to assemble on an appointed date for the purpose of study process (Sharifah Nooraida & Raihnah Abdullah, 2016). Ibn al-Mulaqqin when interpreting this hadith explains that the word *al-hidah* contained in the chapter title carries a negating effect *al-hinayah* which means segregated for women only (2008). This means one day was devoted for women for them to learn knowledge from the Prophet (pbuh).

According to Ibn Hajar, the said hadith demonstrates the female companion's deep determination to learn religious matters. To further exemplify their immense interest in knowledge, there were interactions between the Prophet (pbuh) and the women in the hadith whereby the latter let the Prophet to determine the day of the lesson as illustrated by the actual text in Arabic "*faj'al lana*" which means "decide for us". (2011). Al-Birmawi, in furtherance to the above interpretation finds the text "*ij'al*" with the intention of "*al-ta'yin*" which means "decision". In line with this decision aspect by the Prophet (pbuh), al-'Aini is found to have interpreted the text "*min nafsika*" (from you) with several meanings; among others are the decision of the Prophet (pbuh) and not that of the women; or possibly it means the time of the Prophet (pbuh); apart from might mean the day that the Prophet is unrestricted (n.d.). The views of al-'Aini are echoed by al-Kirmani in his works entitled *al-Kawakib al-Darari fi Syarh Sahih al-Bukhari* (1981). Muhammad Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri on the other hand opines that the word "*min nafsika*" used by the women in the textual hadith refers to their own acknowledgment that it is inappropriate of them to determine the day they should acquire knowledge from the teacher instead it is the teacher who has the right to so decide (2005). Their approach was unique in such a way by using appropriate language and decorum which commensurate their positions

as individuals who years to learn and also by totally submitting to the Prophet (pbuh) as the teacher in determining the learning sessions.

The woman who uttered the said interaction with the Prophet (pbuh) according to Ibn Hajar refers to Ummu Sulaym despite of other opinion that says other woman from the prophetic time. In continuance to the request, the Prophet (pbuh) responded by organizing a get together with the women to dispense advice. Ibn Hajar opines that there are additional *sanad* from Abu Hurairah that expresses the meeting took place at one of the companion women's house. This means that the Prophet (pbuh) came to the house and deliver the hadiths to them (Ibn Hajar, 2011). Pertaining to the meeting of the Prophet (pbuh) with the women, al-'Aini explains that the meanings of the text "*laqiyahunna fihi*" refers to the day that was selected and the meeting took place; whether with the meaning of "seeing" or the meaning of "arrived" (n.d.).

Ibn Battal when construing this hadith elaborates that the hadith signifies that there were instances where the women queried about their religion, with which indicates the permissibility on the women to interact with men in any particular matters when the situation necessitates the interactions. Due to the interactions, Ibn Battal further explains that other women companion apart from the wives of the Prophet (pbuh) became the source of knowledge (2003).

In addition to that, the hadith which was also discussed by Ibn al Jawzi in his works *Kashf al-Mushkil min Hadith al-Sahihayn* finds the women during prophetic time sought goodness and in pursuit of afterlife rewards. They prayed with the Prophet (pbuh) congregationally and thereby the Prophet (pbuh) gave out advice and allocated one day for them. According to Ibn al-Jawzi, it is indeed permissible for women to attend religious assembly if they do so modestly, devoid of flashy accessorisation along with consented by the husbands as well as maintaining distance from other men; all of which are the decorum of believing ladies. The women in this context need to be reminded to stay away from vain deeds and it is upon the teacher to encourage them to fulfill their obligations and prevent them from harm. (n.d.)

Al-Qastalani when commenting on the text "*ghalabana 'alaika al-rijal*" contained in the *matn* of the hadith points to the men being more accompanying to the Prophet (pbuh) each day learning about the prophetic revelation from him (1995). Likewise 'Abd Hamid al-Sanhajj who characterize the men as associating with the Prophet (pbuh) to learn something. In such situation and context, the women could not afford to be at par with the men when their positions were only pronounced if at all by the last prayer row in the mosque, thus causing the lecture and sermons to be less audible when the Prophet (pbuh) made the post prayer sermon. The women were seen as equally interested to obtain knowledge and they were aware that they were equally accountable in *syara'*, therefore it was only fitting that they too be well informed. As such, the women took the initiatives to request from the Prophet (pbuh) that religious discourses and learning be made available to them and for them only (1983).

The above approach by the women to gain knowledge direct from the Prophet (pbuh) and exclusively for them according to Hamzah Muhammad Qassim stemmed from the restricted

time that the women had little of to have direct audience with the Prophet (pbuh) to obtain answers and solutions to the issues that arose as compared to the men whose entire time were spent around the Prophet (pbuh) (1990).

Apart from that, Abu Shuqqah comments on the hadith that the allocated day for women was an added approach for them to obtain knowledge from the Prophet (pbuh) beside their presence in the mosque together with the men when the Prophet (pbuh) gave sermons. This means that the women acquired knowledge from the Prophet (pbuh) from two means, namely attending sermons at the mosque and attending classes exclusively for them.

In addition, there is another almost identical hadith from the textual sense that which also narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri compiled by al-Bukhari in *Kitab al-I'tisam bi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah* under the chapter of *Ta'lim al-Nabi SAW Ummatuhu min al-Rijal wa al-Nisa' Mimma 'Allamahu Allah, Laisa bi Ra'yin wa la Tamthil* (2000) and also by Muslim in *Kitab al-Bir wa al-Silah wa al-Adab* under the chapter of *Fadl man Yamut lahu Walad Fayahtasibah* (n.d.) as follows:

From Abu Sa'id al-Khudri that there came a woman to the Prophet and said: O Messenger of Allah men took all your hadiths, then give us a day for us to come to learn from what Allah has taught to you. The Prophet (pbuh) said: Assemble you on a certain day in a certain place. So the women gathered and approached by the Prophet and taught them religious knowledge. Then the Prophet said: None of you when succeeded by the death of three children unless they will become a wall for her from the fire of hell. Then there is a woman who asked: O Messenger of Allah if two? The question is repeated twice. Answer the Prophet: and two and two and two.

From the context of the approach of the female companion, Ibn al-Mulaqqin interprets the above hadith as a form of request from the students to the teacher to allocate one day for them to seek knowledge and also another form of answer from the teacher who answers their request, as well as exemplify the need to make announcements of the gathering for acquiring knowledge so that the women could assemble (2008).

Ibn Battal also shares the same observation; on the purpose of the said hadith (2003). Similarly Ibn Hajar views that this hadith is regarding one female companion whose request was answered by the Prophet (pbuh) by delivering knowledge given to him by Allah (2011). According to al-'Aini, in all probability the woman who so requested from the Prophet (pbuh) was Asma' bint Yazid (n.d.). The hadith according to al-Qastalani displays the gathering was arranged on a certain day and place (1904). Time as stated in the hadith according to 'Ali al-Mulla al-Qari is during daytime either at the mosque or at home (2002).

The Rights to Join Lectures Attended by Men

Apart from the exclusive women only study sessions, the women were given rights to attend public study sessions with the men. This scenario is demonstrated by a hadith contained in *Kitab al-'Ilm* as follows:

The Prophet (pbuh) went out with Bilal and the Prophet thought his speech was not heard therefore he cautioned the women and ordered them to give alms. Thus a woman gave

her earrings and gold ring and Bilal kept them in his pocket (Al-Bukhari, 2000).

According to Ibn al-Mulaqqin, this hadith indicates the obligation of the government to fulfil their responsibility of providing the same education to women and man (Ibn al-Mulaqqin, 2008). The same view resonates with Ibn Battal's whom states that it is imperative for the government to focus on matters pertaining to the education of its people and to dispense reminders. From an educational standpoint men and women have equal rights. Therefore, the leaders are responsible for those who are under their leadership including men and women without any difference when it comes to education (Ibn Battal, 2003) while Ibn Hajar believes that the call to providing educations to the women does not rest on the women's family per se, but in fact the call extends to the top leadership and the administration thereof (Ibn Hajar, 2011).

From the standpoint of background of the hadith, al-'Aini describes the Prophet's (pbuh) concern for women's rights in education was highlighted when the Prophet took the initiative to get out of the men's row thinking the women could not hear his lectures thus he walked towards them (Al-'Aini, 1999). Further, al-Qastalani views that the Prophet took the initiative to pass through the rows of male congregation right to the women at the back and gave reminders to them of heavens and hell as well as cautioning them about mistakes and sins thus ordered them to give charity. In this instance, some of the women parted with the earrings they had on them as charity. The jewelries were collected by Bilal and distributed to those rightfully in need (Qasim, 1990). This hadith which shows the fact that the Prophet (pbuh) came out from his sermon spot going through the row (*saff*) of male audience heading towards the females' at the back with Bilal represents the basis that women were indeed attending education gatherings in public where they were reminded of consequences of sins; together with men provided that they were safe from *fitna* (Al-Qastalani, 1904).

This hadith also exemplifies the encouragement for leaders to come to women after sermon when they are unsure if the audience at the back could hear them by cautioning and dispensing advices to them as long as that situation does not amount to *mafsadah*. The hadith also describes the segregation between the genders in a same gathering. This is particularly so because the mixing of men and women may amount to the incidents of *fitna* due to illicit eye-sight or others (Al-Mubarakfuri, 1984).

This hadith indirectly indicates that women did attend education gathering in the mosque during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) along with the men although they were seated behind the men's rows. In short, they were very interested in acquiring knowledge circa the commencement of the prophetic era. As such, it was narrated that they were enthusiastic to hear narrations of the prophetic traditions and attending prayer congregations with the Prophet with the aim of gaining knowledge. According to Salah 'Abd al-Ghani, due to the fact that women are encouraged to perform obligatory prayers at home, the Prophet had taken an initiative to allocate one entrance at the Masjid Nabawi which to this day is known as Bab al-Nisa' (1996).

The Rights to Directly Ask Questions to the Teacher

There are hadiths which illustrate that women are not barred from seeking knowledge through questions posed to the Prophet (pbuh). One of them is as follows:

Narrated by 'A'isha: Asma (may Allah be pleased with both of them) once asked the Prophet (pbuh) concerning post menstruation cleansing. He then answered: Take water and sidr leaves then cleanse the blood passageway until they are completely clean. After which, pour water over the head and scrub hard so that the water moisturizes the hair to the roots after which pour again water onto the head. Then, take a cloth or cotton dipped in musk and clean again the (menstruation) passage with it. Asma again asked: How do I clean it with the cloth or cotton? He replied: Subhanallah, just clean it up. Thus 'A'isha whispered to Asma; Rub the place soiled with blood (vagina) with it. Then Asma also asked concerning bathing on account of junub. The he said use water and cleanse properly. After that pour water on the head and scrub until the water moisturize the hair roots. Then pour water again on the head. Then 'A'isha said: How splendid were the women of the Ansar; shyness did not prevent them from becoming learned in the faith (Al-Bukhari, 2000).

According to al-'Aini, this hadith exemplifies a woman posing questions for the learned pertaining to the womanly matters. In this regard, 'A'isha used the phrase "shyness did not prevent the Ansar women from becoming learned in the faith". There is also repetition of answers for the purpose of imparting deeper comprehension for the questioner. Apart from that, the hadith also records someone giving interpretation to the utterance of the learned to the student who was unable to grasp the explanation by the teacher as evidenced by 'A'isha who explained the meaning of what the Prophet was trying to convey to Asma. In other words, the questioner upon failing to understand the answer, will be assisted by others who so understood and this occurs before the learned/teacher. In addition, this kindness engaged by the Prophet (pbuh) to his students displayed high virtues of him in educating women (Al-'Aini, n.d.).

Al-Battal opines that this hadith shows that there is no obstacle for women to ask about matters of menstruation and what it entails in religion (2003). It is an indication of direct interaction by the students with the teacher which was already commonly in practice during prophetic time to gain knowledge from the Prophet (pbuh).

Conclusion

The rights enjoyed by women in education during prophetic time stemmed from a prophetic tradition in which there is a hadith that orders Muslims to seek knowledge without gender bias. In furtherance to the hadith, women are not prevented from exercising their rights to have educations, in particular religious' studies. As such, it is not surprising that women were allowed to attend lectures specifically designed for them as well as attending public lectures which were also joined by men in the mosque. In addition, women were also allowed by the Prophet (pbuh) to obtain knowledge directly from him by way of questions posed to him. In

short, it is clear that Islam does not exclude women from education. They have the same rights as men. Overall, the call for seeking knowledge in Islam is not exclusive to men but it extends to women in spite of the majority of the rulings found in the al-Quran and Sunnah from the point of its connotation is genderless. Thus, with this historical fold in history, it is wise that women of present day be inspired by the spirit of seeking knowledge of the women of the Prophet's day and emulate them in their pursuit to be knowledgeable; befitting the religion itself which put importance upon the value of education in one's life.

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