



Islam and Girl Child Education

INTRODUCTION:

This paper is divided into four parts for purposes of comprehension and cohesion. The first part will discuss the concept of education in Islam, while the second part will look at the status of education in Islam. The third part will be an exposition on the position of Islam on girls/women education. The fourth and concluding part will highlight clogs in the wheel of girls' education, way forward and conclusion.

Concept of Education in Islam:

Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta'ala) said:

“Read! In the name of your Lord and cherisher, who created – created man
out of a mere clot of congealed blood: Read! And your Lord is most bountiful,
He who taught (the use of) the pen, - taught man that which he knew not” (96:1-5)

“And he taught Adam the names of all things; then he placed them before the angels, and said: “tell me the names of these if you are right.” They said: “Glory to you: of knowledge we have none save what you have taught us: in truth it is you who are perfect in knowledge and wisdom” (2:31-2)

These two verses have been chosen as a starting point for this discussion to illustrate the fact that the message of Islam is based on knowledge, since the first revelation from Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta'ala) to Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) was an instruction to read. Thus, the only way to appreciate the essence of the message is through knowledge. The second verse illustrates the fact that it is only with knowledge-“the names of all things” that a person has the prerequisite for attaining the power of reasoning without which nothing will make sense to anyone.

Now that we have established the fact that the basis of the *deen* itself is knowledge and its essence and comprehension can only be derived through knowledge, we can proceed to ask ourselves what is meant by knowledge in the Islamic context. Does it mean knowledge to do with *ibadaat* like prayer, fasting, reading the Qur'an etc? On the other hand, is it to do with mastering the great books of *fiqh*, *hadith* etc?

Contrary to popular belief, education in Islam does not only mean knowledge dealing with *Ibadaat* and *mu'amalat*. Rather it encompasses any kind of knowledge in the sciences, humanities etc, which imbibes and moves within the framework of Islam and its concepts. This is achieved by utilizing the two main sources of knowledge prescribed by Islam. These are:

- i. Divine revelation – having to do with stable and unchangeable injunctions inspired by Allah through which people could be guided to the divine truth.
- ii. The human intellect and its tools which are in constant observation, contemplation, experimentation and application.

According to Imam Al- Ghazali in his renowned book “*Ihya Ulumud-deen*, the only time knowledge becomes blameworthy and therefore discouraged or prohibited in Islam is thus:

1. When it leads to the harm of another e.g. magic, sorcery etc.

2. If it causes harm to the acquirer.
3. If it is of no use to one who acquires it.

This clearly attests to the fact that a Muslim's search for knowledge should be as expansive as it is inexhaustible, as long as it is guided by and conscious of Islamic principles. The reality in our immediate environment is that many Muslims largely confine themselves to certain branches of knowledge and leave other aspects which they believe wrongly are outside the boundaries of Islam. Religious knowledge and scholarship therefore is one aspect (a very important one) of education in Islam. It can be defined as a body of knowledge comprising of moral, legal, and religious teachings based on the *Qur'an*, *hadith* and the consensus of jurists (*Ijma*) as interpreted and expatiated by historical and contemporary Ulama whose authority is widely accepted or acknowledged. It is the basis on which all other forms of knowledge lie, because with it one is armed with the yardstick to explore other forms of knowledge and classify it within or outside the framework of Islam.

Status of Education in Islam:

This part will attempt to illuminate benefits derived from the pursuit, dissemination and application of knowledge as espoused in the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him)

Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta'ala) said in the *Qur'an*;

"Allah bears witness that none has the right to be worshipped but he
And the angels and those having knowledge also give witness....."
(Quran-3:18)

In this verse, Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta'ala) began attestation on first himself, then his angels and then the learned. From this, it was understood that the rank of the learned is very high. Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta'ala) said in the Qur'an, "Allah will raise up to ranks and degrees those of you who believe and who have gained knowledge" (Qur'an: 58:11)

Ibn Abbas (RA) commenting on this said "The rank of the learned is seven hundred times more than that of the believers, and the difference between the two ranks is the distance of the path of 500 years."

The prophet Muhammad said on this rank; "the superiority of a learned man over a worshipper is like the superiority of moon over stars"

The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) said, "Belief is without dress and its dress is the fear of Allah, its ornament is shame and its fruit is knowledge". and: "if a man seeks the path of acquiring knowledge, Allah guides him to a path leading to paradise".

Allah, the All wise says "Say; are those who know equal to those who know not?" (Qur'an 39:8)

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "The scholar is more superior than the devoted worshipper by the same amount that I am superior to the lowest among you". He added: "Surely, Allah, His Angels, the inhabitants of the heavens and earth, and even the ant in its house, and the whale in the sea pray for him who teaches people virtue." Reported by Tirmidhi.

Safwan Ibn Assad reports that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Surely, Angels spread their wings for joy and pleasure with the knowledge seeker."

In another set of verses and *ahadeeth*, Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta'ala) and his Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) enunciate the excellence of disseminating and applying knowledge thus:

The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) said: “how excellent a gift and how excellent a present is a word of wisdom which you hear and remember and then carry it and teach it to your brother Muslim

Concerning dissemination he said: “the simile of guidance and knowledge with which Allah sent me is like that of profuse rain falling upon a certain locality. One spot becomes full of water and consequently abundant herbs and grasses grow therein. The ditches and canals in another spot reserve water and Allah gives benefit to mankind therewith. They drink water there from, irrigate their lands and grow crops. Then there is a spot, which neither hoards water nor grows any grass and herb.

The first simile is that of a man who gets benefit from his knowledge. The second simile is that of a man who does benefit to others. The third simile is that of a man who is deprived of both benefits.”

Mu’adh Bn Jabal (May Allah be pleased with him) said: “Seeking knowledge for the sake of Allah is a sign of consciousness of Allah; acquiring it is an act of worship; studying it is a glorification of Allah; and searching for it is a kind of jihad.” Reported by Imam Muslim.

Finally the prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) said: when a man dies, all his actions stop except three

- ✓ A permanent endowment for charity.
- ✓ Useful knowledge, and
- ✓ Righteous successors.

What more can I say? There are a lot more Qur’anic verses and *ahadeeth* of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) which further illustrate the gains derivable from teaching learning and application of knowledge. How well the Muslim understands and fulfills his role as a human being will depend on the type of knowledge he acquires, the sources he depends on, the ways in which he gains knowledge and the purposes for which he uses the knowledge gained.

Does Islam Give Priority to Males or Females in the Search for Education?

From the foregoing, we can see clearly that education and knowledge in Islam apart from being obligatory and therefore a form of worship is full of benefits, firstly to the learner, then to the teacher and even to the society. Moreover, knowledge can be classified as good for its own sake and not for its connection with other qualities. It is then appropriate to pause and ask a pertinent question- when Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta’ala)) and his noble prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) proclaimed knowledge and its benefits were they referring to males or females.

The first and most crucial obligation on all Muslims, male or female is to acquire knowledge. This is so because all actions of a Muslim must be based on correct knowledge. The Muslim cannot worship Allah in ignorance and his action should not be based on blind imitation for this is not the mark of a thinking, sensible human being. It is impossible to be a Muslim, to live according to the requirements of Islam, and at the same time live in a state of ignorance.

The whole Qur’an refers to both male and female in its call: O you who believe; those that believe in Allah and do good deeds. Likewise, both *Aljannah* and *Jahannam* are either promised to men and women who believe or who disbelieve. There is no distinction between male and female in acts of worship or reward. Allah says; “So their Lord accepted of them, never will I allow the work of any of you to be lost, be you male or female, you are one of another.”(Qur’an 3;195)

Women just like men are enjoined to compulsorily seek for knowledge for the prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.) said; “Seeking of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim” (both male and female).

A large number of Muslim scholars were women, such as Aishah wife of the prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), Amrah Bint Abdur Rahman, Mu’adhah Al - Adawiyah and the wives of the prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Other women worthy of mention are Jawzdaniyyah, who had the best knowledge of chain of transmitters of traditions of the Prophet and who had the best memory in her time; Ajeebah Al – Baqdariyyah, who was the only one in the world in her time to narrate certain *ahaadith*. Nearer home, Asma’u Bint Fodio daughter of renowned scholar and reformer Shaykh Uthman Bn Fodio was as great a scholar as any of the contemporary students of her great father as evidenced by the many books, poems, pamphlets and treatise on a wide range of subjects which she left behind.

The Mufti of the Ummah, Shaykh ‘Abdul-‘Azeez Ibn ‘Abdullaah Ibn Baaz (d.1420H, rahimahullaah) when asked ‘What do you say about the woman’s role in calling to Allah?’ He answered that; “She is like the man, she should call to Allah, and order the good and forbid the evil, since the texts from the Noble *Qur’an* and the Pure *Sunnah* prove this, and the words of the scholars are clear about this. So she should call to Allah, order the good and forbid evil in accordance with the manners prescribed in the *sharee’ah* (revelation) that are required from the man. She should also take care of another matter, which is that she should be an example of chastity and cover herself with *hijab* in front of males who are not *mahram* for her and she should avoid mixing with men.”

This means that she has to seek for knowledge to effectively carry this burden of which she will be asked to account on the day of judgement.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) became the first teacher of women and emphasized their education through a Hadith where he said “whoever brings up three daughters or three sisters or two sisters or two daughters and gives them a broad education, treats them well and gives them in marriage, for him is paradise

Education is the foundation and key of existence. Therefore, Islam does not discriminate against anyone in the search, dissemination and application of knowledge. What then has led to the current situation where education of girls and young adult females is neglected and considered unimportant?

Challenges to Girl & Women Education:

Over the ages in all civilizations and in Judaism & Christianity, the girl/woman was accorded an inferior or sub-human status. To the Greeks and Jews she was both a source of evil and misfortune; the Chinese and Hindu refer to the woman not as an entity but through her father, husband or son. Jewish scriptures view her as under an eternal curse while Christianity portrays Jesus’ mission to man was to redeem him of the sins a woman was responsible for. So also the Arabs, who viewed the girl as a burden to the family and buried her alive at birth.

All these perspectives of girls/women overlapped into most societies and continued over time and to date the girl/woman does not receive priority attention.

Islam set in motion a process that would guarantee women equality with men before Allah and create general awareness that they possessed a distinct individuality of her own. It took one-step at a time to achieve its goal. From prohibition of preferential treatment among children to emphasizing special care to girls, to laying down rights and responsibilities of partners in marriage, rights to inheritance,

duty on her as on the male to command good and prohibit evil, the woman emerged as a fully fledged human with independent legal status and independent rights and obligations.

Despite all these reforms however, the societal conception of a girl child today is still far below expected standards. The girl child is required to work to supplement family upkeep, carrying wares on her head from street to street to the market or other public places. She is married off early to reduce cost of living. This marriage in some cases leads to psychological trauma, child motherhood and so on. The following are additional factors detrimental to girls' education worldwide.

- Most *Ulama* still believe that it is haram to educate a woman. Their argument is based on the fact that the education referred to in the Qur'an and the various hadith is that of the religion and even that is limited to the study of the Qur'an, Sunnah, Fiqh and Arabic. They also argue that an educated woman transcends her limits. Western education, some *Ulamah* believes melts away the innocence of a girl and thus it is extremely detrimental to her life.
- Schools run by people who do not have Islamic knowledge. This leads to incompetent mode of instruction and deficient syllabus.
- Cultural practices that take precedence over religious beliefs where boys are given priority over girls. Some parents believe that educating a girl is waste of resources as she will marry and move in to another family.
- Poverty pushes many parents to make their daughters hawk and get temporary relief from financial problems than allow them to go to school.

Why is it important to educate the girl child?

Allah says in the (Qur'an 16:97) "Whoever is righteous, whether male or female, while he or she is a true believer, verily, to him we will give good life and we shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do". The girl child has to earn righteousness and this can happen only through education. Men and women are rewarded equally and that distinction is based only on Taqwa (Qur'an 49:13)"O mankind! We created you from a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well familiar with all things."

In his lecture 'Advice to the Muslimah' Aboo Khadeejah 'Abdul-Waahid pointed out that; "The role of the Muslim woman is a role of guidance and nurturing, raising children upon the Sunnah, producing a generation of young men and women who know their religion and practice it". For the woman to take up this vital role, she definitely needs education.

Ibn Al Jawzi in his book 'Ahkam Al nisa' said; "A woman is accountable just as the man is. She is obliged to seek knowledge of her duties so that she may perform them properly."

Since the girl is the first school for her children, she cannot teach them without knowledge.

It is equally important to educate the girl child for the following reasons;

- Allah has said in the Qur'an: "O you who believe, protect yourself and your family from the hell fire....." (Qur'an 66:6) She cannot perform this duty or play this role of protecting her family without essential knowledge.
- The Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.) said: "You are all shepherds and you will be asked on the day of judgement about your flock." To be a shepherd one needs to have the

technicalities. She needs the knowledge of how to run her house, take care of her family and guide it the best way.

- Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights article 26 stipulates. It is very important to educate the girl child especially so she can play the role that Allah has ordained for her and be a true and faithful believer thereby attaining paradise.
- Education for girls leads to less domestic conflict in the family. Education leads to common understanding and better communication.
- The Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be on him) has said: whoever is not concerned with the situation of Muslims is not one of them. Concern is born only out of education, knowledge of the needs of the Ummah and its environment.
- Muslims today, live in a complex and difficult world dominated by systems of knowledge, technologies and economics, which have marginalized them. The uneducated girl will not be able to impact on the development of the Ummah with the men unless she attains the right education.
- Moreover, the prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) said: “Whoever dies while seeking knowledge in order to revive Islam, will be in paradise and nothing would be between him and the prophets except one degree.” Reported by Ad Darami.
- Women owe the Ummah a duty to know the contemporary world intimately, to be able to analyze it using principles and concepts from the Qur’an and Sunnah, and to offer alternatives for the future direction of man.
- The prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be on him) has said; the best of mankind is he who is beneficial to others. Good education leads to strategies in bringing about a better, more just, caring and a safer world.
- Khilafah and Amanah mentioned in the Qur’an as expected of mankind can only be realised with education. Concepts are supposed to shape our attitude to economic development, politics, environment and ecological balance e.g. The saying of the Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be on him) “Purity is half of faith” and “cleanliness is part of faith” – how does this affect health and sanitation requirements of people living in crowded cities and slums?
- Education for the girl promotes a reduction in poverty. She will be less dependent on either her family or husband. This will also give them a more productive life.
- Education gives her the power to attend to other women’s problems as a doctor, nurse, teacher etc. The woman has a better understanding of her fellow women’s problems.

Way Forward:

The girl child needs to grow intellectually and broaden her horizon, thus making education a very vital part of her life. The Qur’an in so many verses advises all Muslims to read and to think over the signs of Allah; life, the universe, law of nature, the sun, moon, the origins of life and so on. Not a single of such verse singles out whom that education is for.

The Ummah depends on FOMWAN and other Muslim organizations and well to do members of the Ummah to nurture and highlight the true potential of girls and women through the following:

- Set up all girls' schools across the nation.
- Set up female teacher training schools to complement government efforts in that direction
- Sensitize parents on the importance of education.
- Call for the review of curriculum in both public and private schools to include religious and moral studies. The inclusion of skills etc in the curriculum will also help.
- Introduce Islamization of knowledge in their various schools.
- Introduce some form of scholarship fund for girls
- As parents and *du'at* we also need to make conscious and organized effort to direct students to the most needed areas of specialization. Not every child needs to be a doctor, lawyer or engineer. We need representation in the media, communication, education, Police etc. only then will the *Ummah* be able provide constructive, honest and enlightened opposition which will be able to translate plans and claims into action, and show concrete accomplishments.

In conclusion, we have seen that the scope of education in Islam is wide and all encompassing. Its only criteria are that it should move within the framework of Islam and its concepts and utilize the two main sources of knowledge prescribed by it. Islam does not discriminate against any person- male or female with regards to seeking, disseminating and applying knowledge. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their country and the world at large.

The woman is accountable for her deeds just as the men are and she has to seek for knowledge in order to fulfill her needs in both this world and the hereafter. She cannot afford to be ignorant in a world that is moving too fast with daily innovations and progress. To properly worship her Creator and appreciate Him she has to read. Seeking for knowledge from the cradle to grave is a duty upon every Muslim male and female.

Armed with this the Muslim should be the most educated and enlightened citizen of the world. Traveling widely and enriching his knowledge and intellect. Only then can we reap the benefits of education. The journey is long and hard. Nevertheless, with adequate knowledge, preparation and planning, the goal will be attained. We need to start now. Heed the teachings of the Qur'an, follow the path of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) as regards learning and application of it and be steadfast. Only then, can we be more useful and able to abide to the hadith of the Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be on him) which says: "people are the dependents of Allah; the closest to him are the most useful to his dependents" But we should know that not much is achieved by one person or group. Therefore, we should come together and work in unison in order to achieve results. Finally, we should remember that our aim is to contribute and not do it all because we cannot. As Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta'ala) has said: "It is true that you will not be able to guide those

whom you love; but Allah guides those whom He will and he knows best those who receive Guidance” (Qur’an 28:56).

My dear Sisters, we should give priority to the religious education for our children. A child that has memorized the Qur’an at an early age is always a degree above his peers in all other aspects of knowledge seeking. This has been tested and attested over the years. It is like a building that has a very firm foundation which cannot be compared to one that has a weak one.

O Allah I seek Your protection from knowledge that profits not.....

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